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ABSTRACT

The papers in this compilation are the result of K-12 action research projects and were submitted in partial fulfillment for a variety of degrees from Winona State University (Minnesota). The compilation contains the following nine papers: "Will Playing Background Music in My Classroom Help Increase Student Spelling Scores?" (Jonathan L. Wright); "Using Writers' Workshop to Improve Writing Skills" (Margaret M.F. Kraske); "The Effects of the 'Read Naturally Program' on Middle School Students' Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension Skills in a Residential Treatment Setting" (Julie Swannette Onken); "Effects of Visual Phonics to Improve Reading Fluency and Decrease Reading Error Rate in a Remedial Reading Program" (Michelle Breitsprecher); "Will Incorporating the Building Blocks Reading and Writing Approach into a Kindergarten Curriculum Increase Literacy Assessment Scores?" (Karmen Beyer); "Literature Circles" (Colleen Hansen Egle); "Will Students Be Able to Obtain Information More Quickly and Accurately from a Hard Copy of 'USA Today' or Its Internet Site?" (Todd Francis Gasner); "Will Students Benefit from Spending More Class Time on Spelling and Spending More Class Time on Varied Approaches to Learning Spelling Words in Class throughout the Week?" (Jeffrey Michael Anderson); and "Using an Author's Chair in a Kindergarten Classroom" (Tara Bradford). (NKA)

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ED 478 113

Sherman, Thomas F. (Ed.D. Education) and Margaret Lundquist, (M.S. Education)

COMPILATION OF K-12 ACTION RESEARCH PAPERS IN LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATION

These papers are partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science Degree in Education at Winona State University.

Action Research was encouraged to stimulate a practitioner approach to curricular and instructional renewal and improvement. The traditional format for the papers helped to coach fundamental research strategies. The students were encouraged to keep their questions and hypothesis directed at very specific issues in their teaching environment.

Each student was required to assemble an advisory team that included:

1) One facilitator or lead advisor, to provide support in the research design and process,
2) Four-to-six fellow graduate students to interpret and synthesize the organizational and writing process, and an
3) Outside content specialist to assure the knowledge base. Outside refers to a person outside the learning community who is a recognized specialist in the content area of the action research. Thus, if the action research related to music, a music specialist was required as a member of the advisory team.

The advisory team provided critical support to the successful paper.

The action research concluded with an oral examination or presentation to encourage and develop leadership skills through informing their associates, their departments or their schools.

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Wright, Jon 1

Will playing background music in my classroom help increase student spelling scores?

By

Jonathan L. Wright

Bachelor of Arts, University of Minnesota, Morris, 1994

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Winona State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Education

2002

This capstone entitled:

Will playing background music in my classroom help increase student's spelling scores?

Written by Jonathan L. Wright

Has been approved by the Department of Education

Facilitator's Signature

Margaret Lundquist

Margaret Lundquist

The signatories have examined the final copy of this capstone, and we find that both the content and the form meet the acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above-mentioned discipline.

Advisory Committee Signatures

Dwight Miller

AMK Miller

Ann Miller

Sarah Ohm

Kelly Rusert

Kelly Rusert

Resource Person's Signature

Mary Baier

Mary Baier

Karmen C Beyer

Karmen Beyer

Abstract

Wright, Jonathan (M.S., Education)

Will playing background music in my classroom help increase student spelling scores?

Thesis directed by Facilitating Professor Margaret Lundquist and Advisory Committee

The objective of this research was to find out if playing background music in my classroom would help increase students spelling scores. For the first two quarters of the school year I conducted my spelling class as I normally had in the past, without any changes. During the third and fourth quarters, Mozart was played while the students did any studying or daily work for my spelling class.

After compiling all of the data for the research, the results were found to be inconclusive. The data shows an actual decrease in spelling scores in the third quarter and then a rebound in the fourth. This is an almost exact replica of the class math scores for the year. This has led the researcher to believe that playing Mozart as background music to increase student scores was inconclusive and that there may have been other factors that could have influenced the results of the research.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to

My Parents

and

Grandparents

For giving me everything I needed

including love and encouragement.

Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When trying to find a capstone project, I thought a long time about what would interest me and still be beneficial to my teaching. I came to the conclusion that there were a lot of things that I would like to learn about, but only a few that would lend itself to my classroom. For years now I have always had a radio or some type of music playing in my classroom while I have been teaching. Usually, it was during a free time or study time. I decided to take a closer look into music and achievement in an educational setting. I wanted to find out if playing background music would enhance my students' performance in the classroom.

Need For Study

The basic fact that I wanted to learn was if I played background music while the students studied, would they retain more information thus increasing their ability to learn more and recall more information. Music has played a part of everyone's life in some form or another. It is very influential and I believe it can help us learn. If it does show that kids learn better while listening to background music I plan to play it everyday in my class. My hope is that I can give my students an added advantage by doing something as simple as listening to music.

Statement of the Problem

I believe that playing background music will have a positive affect on my students' scores. I'm not certain the amount of affect, but I believe there will be a positive change in their spelling scores.

Statement of the Question

Will playing background music in my classroom help increase student-spelling scores?

Definition of Terms

Mozart Effect – term dubbed to the increased activity in the brain caused from listening to classical pieces from Mozart.

Control – this term will refer to the first and second quarter of the year when the students were not listening to the background music.

Experimental – this term will refer to the third and fourth quarters. During these quarters music was played during their spelling period.

Pretest – this is a spelling test given to the students without any prior studying.

Final Test – this was the last test the students took after studying the words all week.

Spelling Workbook – the workbook included worksheets for the pretest and their daily assignments.

Limitations of the Study

There are a few limitations to this study. First, the researcher was using only Mozart music for the research. In doing this, the researcher hoped to limit the variables that could be introduced into this research. The research could have included different genres of music to see if the genre made a difference. For simplification, the research was limited for practical purposes.

Secondly, the success of the research will be based solely on the students' spelling scores. Other subject grades have been used for comparison in this research but the music was only played during the spelling period. Previous research has shown improvement in different subject areas such as math when music is introduced into the classroom.

The final limitation was the increasing difficulty of the spelling work throughout the year. Although the subject matter was ever changing, all of the work came from the same reading series designed to follow the developmental level for third grade. This could skew the results in that the scores may appear lower even though the students could be retaining more information because of the music being played.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

"Music is language that everyone speaks and understands. We are all born rhythmical people—we lived with our mother's heartbeat for nine months before we were born." (Dickinson 1993) The development of the brain is process that can be benefited by musical training. "Little is known, for example, about what kinds of musical training produce results and what kinds don't, who benefits most, and how long any intellectual gains that result from music learning will last." (Viadero 1998)

The Mozart Effect is a popular theory stating that listening to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's compositions will increase a person's ability to learn. "Only the Mozart, though, also activated areas of the brain known to process fine motor coordination, vision, and other higher thought processes, all of which could explain improved spatial reasoning." (Anderson 2000) Many schools are making use of this theory in their curriculum. "A third report reveals that the schools who produced the highest academic achievement in the United States today are spending 20 to 30% of the day on the arts, with special emphasis on music." (Dickinson 1993)

Not all researchers have bought into the Mozart Effect theory. "Exaggerated and even false claims that listening to Mozart's music will augment intelligence have become so prevalent that the truth of the matter has become hopelessly obscured." (Anderson 2000) Viadero (1998) "contends that all the enthusiasm in education, media and policymaking circles for the new music-learning research is premature." As an educator, I can side with this thought process. As a professional, we tend to look for any advantage that we can use for children to learn and succeed. This could lead us to false claims and to a media led revolution of education curriculum. I believe that Dr. Thomas Anderson (2000) said it best when he said, "Music educators should be aware of the controversy, and neither center music curricula around certain types of music for maximum intelligence building, nor exclude the possibility that there may be a link between listening to music and intelligence."

CHAPTER 3

DATA COLLECTION

Participants

Research was conducted in a third grade classroom. The class itself consisted of nineteen children. Of these nineteen students, four were excluded from the study for the following reasons: three of the children were excluded because their spelling curriculum was being supplemented by the special education department, and the fourth student was excluded because he was a new student that moved into the classroom midway through the first quarter. This student also came from a non English-speaking district and lived in a non-English speaking home. This too, was a factor in his exclusion. This left me with fifteen students, which were made up of seven girls and eight boys. All of these students received the same directions and did the same amount of work for their spelling grade.

Procedures

The class followed the spelling program laid out in the McGraw-Hill reading curriculum. This curriculum integrates both the reading and spelling curriculums into one. The students saw all of their spelling words throughout the story they were reading for that week and they would see them in the small books written at grade level that support each story. The concept behind it is that the students would see all of their spelling words many times throughout the week.

Every week the students followed the same procedures that were laid out in the reading curriculum. The students had in their possession a spelling workbook in which they used almost exclusively as a study tool for the spelling words.

Everyday I would start the class by playing a compact disc that played only instrumental music by Mozart. Once I had started the music, I would begin my spelling lesson. On Monday, the class would preview the words by repeating each word after the teacher had said them. Afterwards, the teacher would give meanings for any word or words that the students may have been unfamiliar with. The class would then proceed to take a pretest on the words. On Tuesday, students worked on the assigned pages from their spelling workbook. The work would focus on the phonetical aspects of the words. For example, if the class was working on the long e sound, the students would have to sort the words according to their spelling patterns such as ee, ea and ie.

On Wednesday they would work on an activity where they would use the words to answer questions or fill in missing words out of sentences. Thursday the class would have three activities. The first was to find six misspelled words in a paragraph. This proof reading was followed by a creative writing section where the students were given a writing prompt and had to use at least four spelling words in their writing. Finally, the students were given a quiz in which they had to choose the correct spelling word out of the four choices given. On Friday, the class would play a spelling game as review just before the test was given and then the students would take the final test.

Data Collection Tools

After the students had completed the daily assignments the researcher would collect the assignments to be used as data in the research. The researcher also relied on the final tests that were given each week for more data.

CHAPTER 4

Process of Data Analysis

Once all the data was collected the researcher found the average spelling score for the class. The researcher also found the class averages in reading, math and grammar to compare to the spelling scores. Once the class average for spelling was found the researcher also found the average for each quarter for all the boys and girls in the class. All of these were then formatted to a graph for ease of analysis.

Results

Looking at the class' average scores for the four quarters of the school year (Appendix A), the graph shows a significant drop in spelling scores from the second to the third quarter. It is important to keep in mind that the first two quarters were used as the control in this research and that music was not played at any other time throughout the day. In the first quarter the students' average grade was an 88%, but then dropped to 84% by the end of the second quarter. This does show an immediate drop of 4% in the students' grades during the control period. This could have been the result of the increasing difficulty of the curriculum.

The third quarter spelling scores show the scores dropped once again, this time only by 3%, the total now being 81%. This however, is in the experimental part of the research when the music was being played. Looking at the data one could say that the music had not made a difference in the scores but the drop was not as large as the previous quarter. Taking a look at the fourth quarter you can see that the spelling scores rebounded back up to 87%. That is only a 1% difference from their highest average from the first quarter.

After looking at the class as a whole, the students were divided into two groups determined by sex. In the class of fifteen, there were seven girls and eight boys who participated in the research. Looking at the average scores for both sexes (Appendix B) we see can that both sexes exhibited almost the same scores. During the control period of the experiment, both the boys and the girls showed the same decline, 4%, in their achievement scores. However, in the first quarter of the experimental period, the boys show a larger drop in average scores than the girls. From the second quarter to the third quarter the boys dropped from 84% to 76% a decrease of 8%. The girls however, showed an increase of 1% starting at 84% and going up to 85% during the same period.

In the fourth quarter, the girls again showed a gain in spelling scores shooting up 2% for a total of 87%. The boys did show a positive gain in the fourth quarter also. They recovered to 86% showing a 10% gain in the fourth quarter of the school year.

The data led the researcher to look at the other subjects in school to determine the trend of achievement being made by the fifteen students (Appendix C). What the graphs show, when taking the class averages for each subject and separating them into the different quarters, spelling was the best subject overall for the class. You can also draw a correlation to spelling and math. Both subjects showed the same decline in the first three quarters and a convincing rebound in the fourth quarter. This graph also shows the trend of reading and grammar throughout the year. Except for the first quarter, both reading and grammar stayed fairly equal to each other never separating by more than 2%.

The last of the data looked at by the researcher was a questionnaire. It was given out to the students who participated in the research. The questionnaire asked them to give their opinions on the music being played and if they liked it or didn't like it. The results were interesting. The first question dealt with if they liked classical music before the research began. Almost 47 % of the class said that they liked it before they heard it in school (Appendix D). When asked the question if they liked having the music played in the classroom 73 % of the students said that they enjoyed it (Appendix E). Finally, they were asked if they thought that the music really helped them concentrate. Exactly 60 % of the students thought that the music did help them concentrate on their work, while 40 % didn't like it and thought it did not help them concentrate on their work (Appendix F).

After looking at all the data I had many interesting thoughts that could lead to more research and maybe produce some positive results, but using only the data that I collected I found my results inconclusive.

Looking at appendix A, I was satisfied with my control period of the research because with a 4 % difference from the first quarter to the second, I thought that would be an acceptable difference to compare my results. When I found the drop in the third quarter scores I thought that I should stop the action research project and let my class rebound to their better scores thinking it was the music that had caused the drop. I decided to let the experiment run its course and

I'm glad I did. The fourth quarter scores showed a significant gain in achievement. There could be many reasons for the significant gain. I wondered if the students had finally forgotten the music and had started to relax. I also thought the opposite too. Maybe the students had finally learned how to tune out the music and learned how to concentrate in spite of the music playing in the background. I decided I would have to break the data down some more.

I next looked at spelling compared to the different subject areas covered by the same students (Appendix C). What I was looking for was the same trend in the other subjects. I did find the same trend in math. As discussed earlier in this paper, many researchers find a direct correlation to math achievement and Mozart music. Since the music wasn't being played during the math period, I again began thinking my results were inconclusive because math and spelling had the same trend of achievement. My thinking being that if the music had not been played, would the spelling scores show this same trend?

Lastly, I wanted to look at the different achievement levels of the different sexes in my classroom. This I believe was the most interesting finding from this research. As shown in appendix B, the boys and the girls achieved at exactly the same level in both the first and second quarters when there was not any music being played in the classroom. In the third and fourth quarters though the music was being played and the girls showed a significant improvement over the boys especially in the fourth quarter. Did listening to Mozart help the girls achieve more than the boys? Did the girls have better achievement scores because they were able to concentrate more or was it because the music had a negative impact on the boys' ability to concentrate? I believe that the music by Mozart did increase both achievement grades of boys and girls. I think that the girls just showed greater achievement when listening to Mozart.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

I believe that the research done was inconclusive but has opened up other avenues of research. For instance, the data showed a greater increase in achievement in girls than in boys. This could lead into another study on girls and the increased achievement while listening to Mozart. Is there a different genre of music such as jazz or country that would lend itself to increased achievement in boys? Was this research flawed and can it be duplicated? Whether it works like it should or not, or as long as it does not have a negative affect on the group, I believe that I will continue to play Mozart in my classroom.

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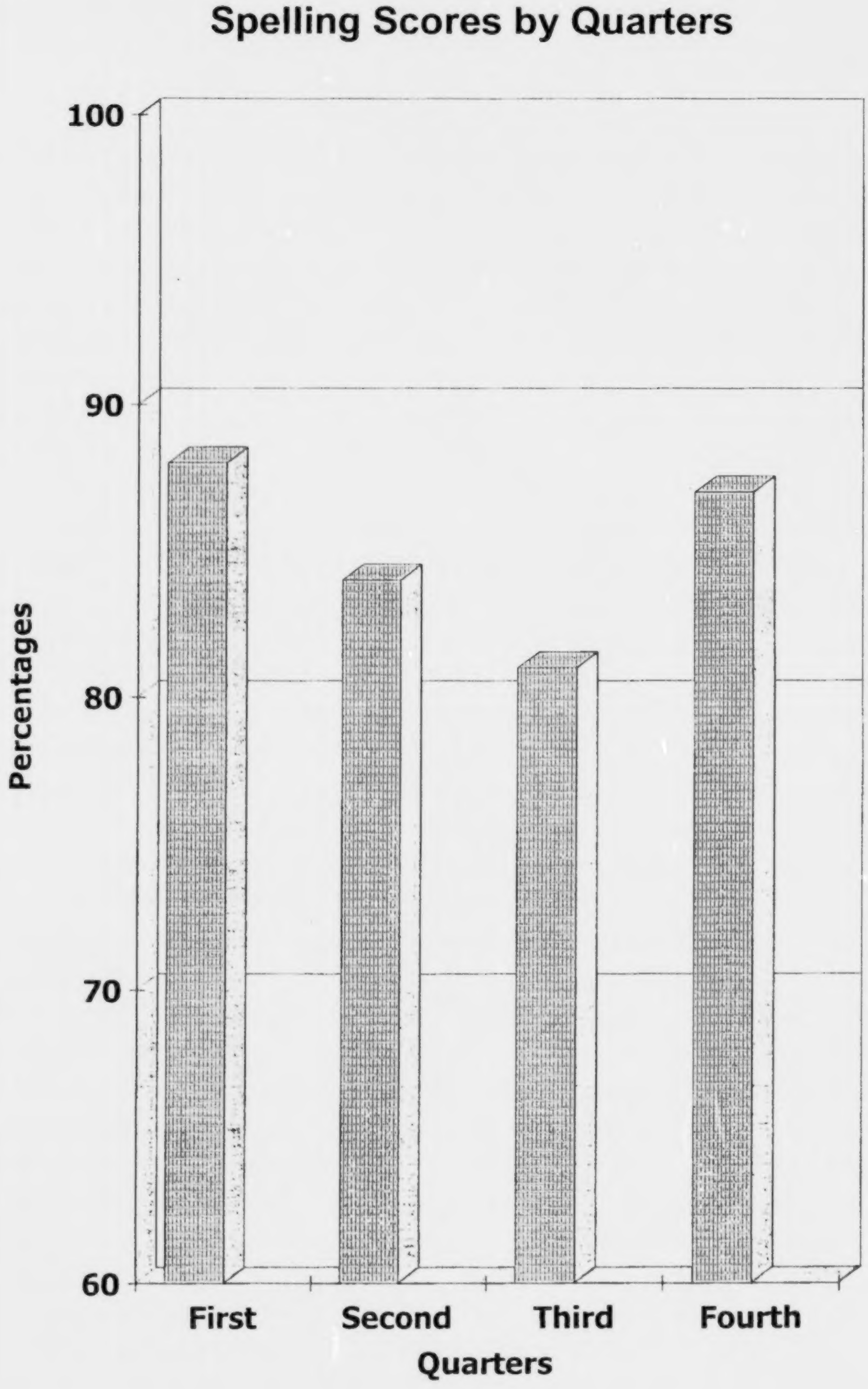
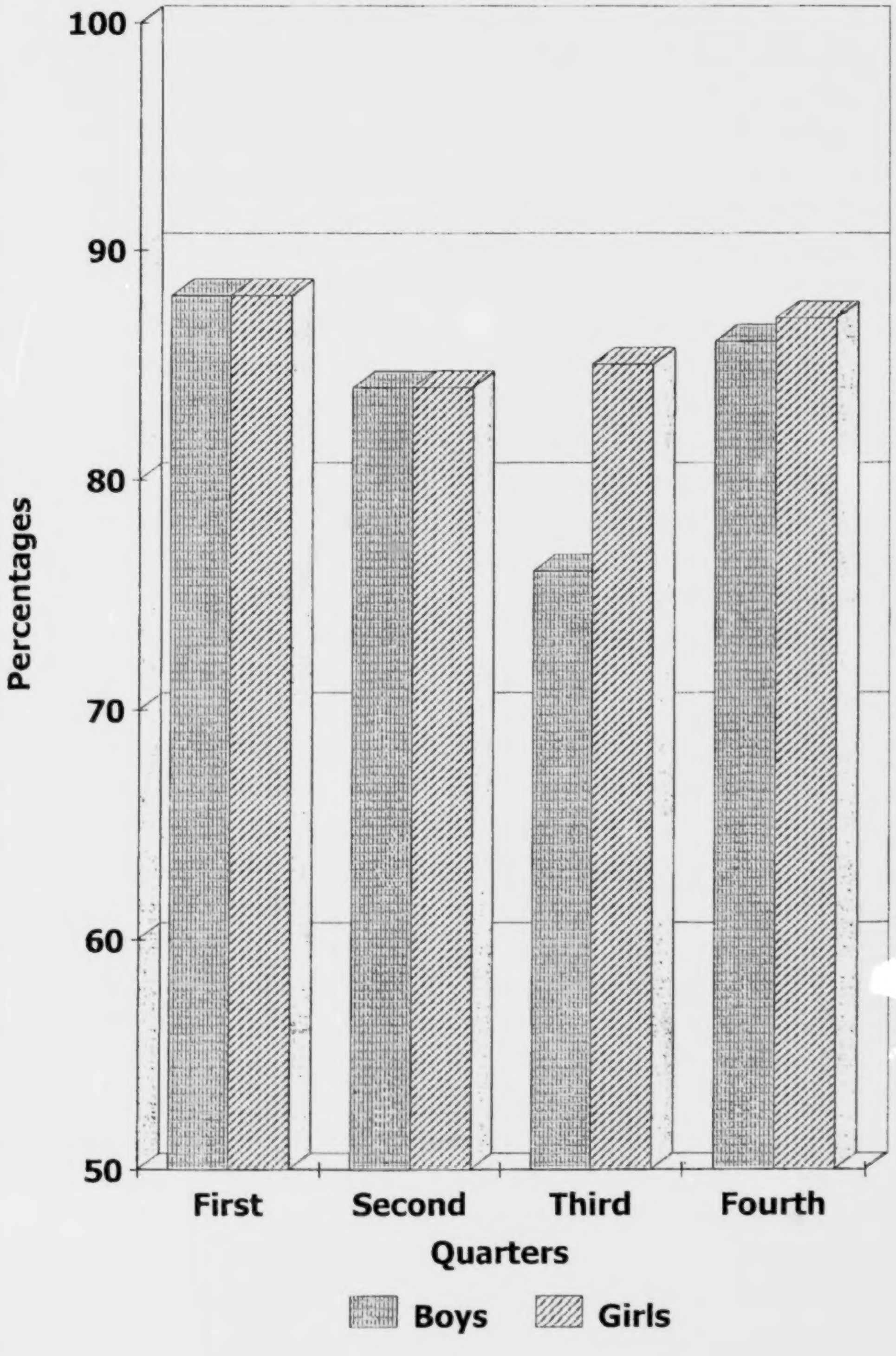
Appendix A


Spelling Scores by Quarters
100
90
80
70
60
Percentages
First
Second
Third
Fourth
Quarters

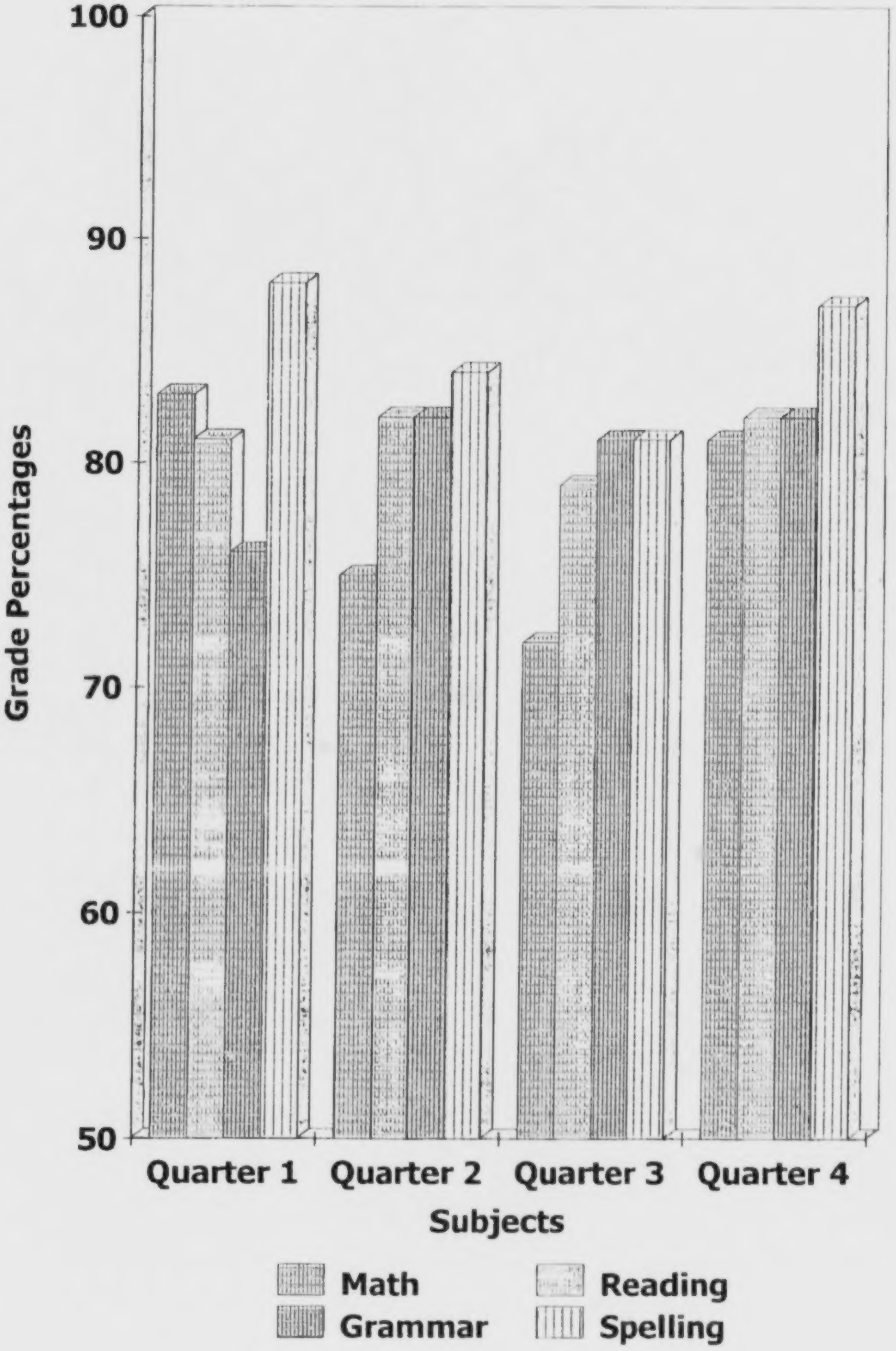
Appendix B

Spelling Scores by Sexes



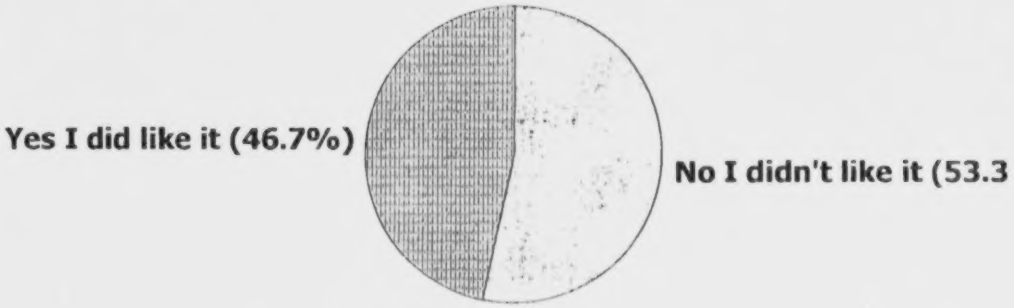
Appendix C

Comparison of Subjects



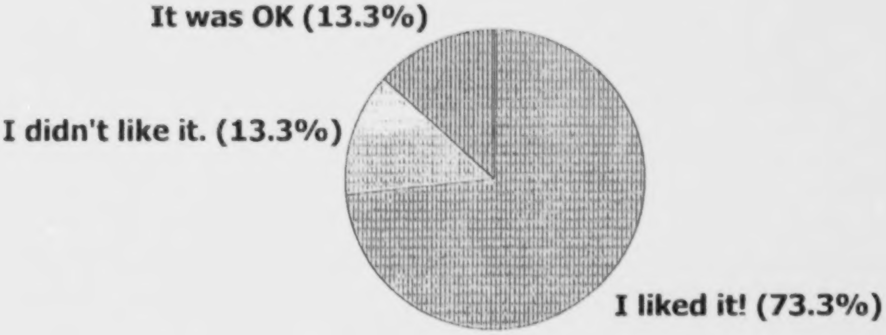
Appendix D

Did you like classical music before?



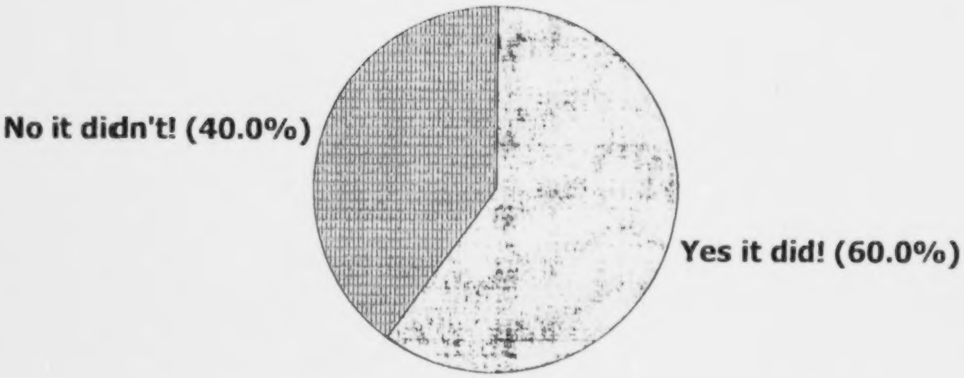
Appendix E

Did you like music in the classroom



Appendix F

Did the music help you concentrate



The Graduate School

of

Winona State University

Using Writers' Workshop to Improve Writing Skills

Capstone Action Research Write Up

by

Margaret M. F. Kraske

Bachelor's of Arts, University of Northern Iowa, 1996

A capstone submitted to

The Graduate School of Winona State University

Masters of Science

Department of Education

2002

Learning Community IV

This thesis entitled:

Using Writers' Workshop to Improve Writing Skills

Written by Margaret M.F. Kraske

Has been approved for the Department of Education

Facilitator's Signature:

Margaret Lundquist

Margaret Lundquist, M.S.

The final copy of this capstone has been examined by the signatories,

and we find that both the content and the form

meet the acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work

in the above mentioned discipline.

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Abstract

Kraske, Margaret M.F. (M.S. Education)

Using Writers' Workshop to Improve Writing Skills

Thesis directed by Margaret Lundquist, M.S.

Traditionally, the teaching of writing has taken place at the front of the classroom with little regard for individual needs. Teachers set the tempo of students' writing by determining the writing process and pace for the particular assignment. The majority of the comments students hear from teachers about their writing come at the completion of a product.

To give students more freedom and flexibility in their writing and more feedback and comments as they wrote, I investigated how to use Writers' Workshop to teach writing. I wanted to see how the use of workshop improved students' writing skills to help them write more detailed and more effectively.

Two main resources I used were *In The Middle* by Nancie Atwell and *Writing Workshop* by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi. Both books highlighted the format of Writers' Workshop in the classroom, strategies to teach writing with workshop, and student writing successes using the workshop format.

I analyzed two writing pieces from twenty students. The first piece they wrote in one class period without instruction in Writers' Workshop, and the second piece they wrote during Writers' Workshop, working on their pieces over an extended period of time. The results demonstrate that Writers' Workshop gives students the opportunity to write more detailed pieces more effectively, thus allowing them the freedom to grow and develop as writers.

Dedication

I dedicate this to Diana Buter who first introduced Writers' Workshop to me and who inspired me to teach middle school students. I also dedicate this to Jodi Edmonson who embodies the ideals of teaching middle school students. Jodi has taught and continues to teach me how to put ideals into practice and always to work to do what is best for students. Thank you to both of you for your support and guidance in helping me to grow as an educator of adolescents. I would not be the teacher I am today without your influence, knowledge, and faith in me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Mr. Sales for igniting my writing desire. Because of his relentless aim for students' writing perfection, I strove to write well and to be proud of my writing. As a teacher, I strive to bring out that same desire in my students—the desire that Mr. Sales cultivated in me. He inspired me and continues to inspire me to bring out the best in my students and myself. Thank you for pushing me, for believing in me, and for sharing your expertise with me. I have the utmost respect for you and for your superb teaching ability.

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CHAPTER I

In my five plus years of teaching, I truly have wanted my students to get excited about their writing as well as improve their skills. However, my methodology felt mundane. My students worked on papers and turned them in. I read them, marked them up, wrote comments, and handed them back. I wanted my students to care about their writing and to be excited. And I wanted them to write a lot. I knew then and know now that the more they write the better writers they can and will become. Writers' Workshop is an excellent opportunity for students to write a lot. Through continuous practice and one-on-one feedback, their writing skills will improve.

I first heard about Writers' Workshop in college and during student teaching, and I always thought it sounded interesting. It wasn't until two years ago that I truly thought about implementing it in my classes. A colleague of mine used Writers' Workshop in her classes and had great success with the program. She told me stories of the wonderful pieces her students were working on. She was excited, her students were excited, and I was jealous. I knew it was an entirely different way of teaching writing for me and that it would put me out of my comfort zone, but I also knew I had to try it.

Need for the Study

I wanted to know if Writers' Workshop would improve students' writing, and I wanted to see how the format of the workshop influenced the way they wrote. I wanted them to become self-directed writers who worked to improve their writing for themselves and not just for me and for a grade. I wanted them to *want* to write for self-expression of their views, thoughts, and ideas. I wanted them to be active writers who worked to improve their pieces.

I also felt that I needed to work more closely with my students on their writing. In the past, I had not taken the time to talk to each and every student about his/her writing. I needed to teach them how to improve their pieces *while* they were writing, not after I graded their work. Ideally during Writers' Workshop, I tried to conference with each student daily. This helped me to understand each student's individual writing needs and weaknesses, and I was able to help each student with his/her own issues. I did not teach to the majority of students in my classes; rather, I individualized writing instruction for each student.

Using Writers' Workshop helped me to take an active role in my students' writing and helped me to become more actively involved in who they were. I better understood their individual skills and abilities by frequently conferencing with them and talking to them.

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, the teaching of writing has taken place at the front of the classroom with little regard for individual needs. My teaching of writing reflected this method of instruction. I dictated my students' writing process by making them prewrite, write, revise, and edit, in that order. The majority of the comments I gave my students came at the completion of a product. My students did not have the freedom to determine what processes worked for them, nor did they have the *time* to work to perfect their writing.

Statement of the Question

Does instruction in Writers' Workshop help students to be more effective and detailed writers?

Definition of Terms

Writers' Workshop

This was time in class when students wrote on a topic of their choice. They wrote for approximately twenty to thirty minutes. During this time, I conferenced with students, they conferenced with each other, and they wrote. If they had a difficult time writing, they read a book of their choice instead.

Detailed writers

These are writers who used figurative language (similes, metaphors, hyperboles, onomatopoeia, etc.) and imagery in their work. Readers were able to picture their stories because of the vivid descriptions.

Effective writers

Effective writers were able to identify weaknesses in their writing and worked to improve the weaknesses. They worked to become self-directed writers who used their resources to make changes. They referred to and used their Skills Used Correctly/Skills to Perfect sheets and notes to make their writing stronger.

Status of the Class

This was a sheet on which I recorded what students were working on each day--drafting, revising, conferencing, typing, etc. The status of the class check helped me to see what progress they made in their writing.

Skills Used Correctly/Skills to Perfect (conference notes)

This was a sheet on which I wrote down what the student had done correctly in his/her piece and what he/she needed to work on. I had one sheet for each student, and each student had a sheet for him/herself. Each student kept track of what we discussed together as well. This became a tool for each student to use to make corrections in his/her work.

Portfolio

Each student decorated a file folder to represent him/her. The students put completed pieces and evaluations in their portfolios.

Mini-lessons

I presented brief lessons to the entire class when a majority of the students shared the same writing concerns or needs. For example, I presented a mini-lesson on commas when I noticed comma mistakes in many students' writing.

Limitations of the Study

I used Writers' Workshop in my two eighth grade English classes which have the same curriculum. After completing my research, I identified some limitations of my study.

The two English classes did not have the same number of students. My fifth hour class had thirty-four students, and my sixth hour class had twenty-seven students. Time was a factor in the larger class; it was more difficult for me to meet with each student individually in the larger class.

I randomly selected five boys and five girls from each class. I used the first personal narratives to determine the random participants. I literally grabbed ten narratives from each class and made sure I had five boys and five girls. If I did not, I grabbed again. My method was not scientific; it was a simple, random selection.

The number of students in my research were not directly proportionate to the number of boys and girls in each class. I wanted to use the works of twenty students for my study, and I wanted to have an equal number of boys and girls. When randomly selecting students for my research, I did not take into account any factors such as race, socioeconomic status, grades, or special services the students may or may not have received.

It was difficult for me to accurately assess if students' writing improvement was a result of Writers' Workshop or a result of other variables such as their maturity, their personal well-being, or other similar factors beyond the scope of my research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

All humans are different; therefore, all students are different. And, each person learns differently. However, teachers do not always recognize how students learn differently; they often teach how they personally learn best. When this happens, teachers can deprive their students of utilizing their talents and abilities.

When teachers require students to follow a rigid writing process that fits the teachers' writing approach and not the students' writing approach, the students often become frustrated and discouraged. For a teacher to put her students in the driver's seat to tackle their writing is like being the drivers' education teacher without a chicken brake. It is scary. However, when teachers give up some control and in turn give their students the freedom to write using an approach that works best for them, the results are exciting and well worth the bumpy, dangerous ride.

Nancie Atwell is the guru for writing workshop for middle school students. She has researched, tried, tested, and implemented this strategy for teaching writing. She is known nationally for her work, and she continues to research to make improvements, changes, and suggestions for teachers who use the approach in their classrooms. Atwell, however, did not always teach writing using workshop.

She began to question her teaching of writing when a student questioned her. Atwell wanted the student to write following a certain process, but he said, "This is the way I write. If I get it done, what do you care?" (Atwell 7). Her frustrations with teaching writing and her students' frustrations with writing prompted her to try an entirely different approach from how she was used to teaching. "When I stopped focusing on me and my methods and started observing students and their learning, I saw a gap between us—between what I did as a language teacher and what they did as language learners" (Atwell 7).

Writers' Workshop (or writing workshop) is a full-immersion approach to writing (Atwell 18). Students write in class rather than only for homework. The teacher works with students as they write, providing dialogue and feedback to help the writers make changes and improvements. "Writing workshop provides time in school for students to work on their writing; it provides time in school for me, too, to work *with* students on their writing" (Atwell 69).

Using writers' workshop provides regular, frequent time for students to write which means regular, frequent opportunities for teaching and learning more about writing (Atwell 56). "Regular, frequent time for writing also allows students to write well. When they have sufficient time to consider and reconsider what they've written, they're more likely to achieve clarity, logic, voice, and grace of good writing" (Atwell 55). Students need regular, predictable time to write to improve their writing skills. "This is as essential as water and light to a plant. They need this time to establish purposes for their writing, and time to achieve those purposes. The more actively engaged students are, the more time you have to coach and instruct them as they grow as writers" (Fletcher and Portalupi 15).

One main premise of writers' workshop is for teachers to work with students *as* they write—not just to give feedback with the final product. Teachers spend a great deal of time reading papers and writing comments for students. However, this time-consuming approach to "teaching" writing does not help students when they need assistance—while they are working on their writing. "After-the-fact response comes too late to do a writer much good; it assumes that students will not only hold the teacher's advice in their heads until the next piece and transfer it to an entirely new situation, but also that they read the teacher's written comments" (Atwell 69).

The writing conference is the heart of workshop, and it gives teachers the one-on-one interaction that most of us want with our students (Fletcher and Portalupi 48). The goal of conferences is to teach students strategies that will improve *all* of their writing, not just one piece. Lucy Calkins has written, "Teach the writer, not the writing" (Fletcher and Portalupi 52). When teachers conference with students individually, they have the opportunity to teach the writer.

Writers' workshop requires teachers to step back and put their students in the driver's seat. Students work at their own paces on topics of their choice, and they relish the opportunity for freedom of choice and flexibility in their work. "The writing workshop puts students on the spot and requires them to be active learners. If it's done right, your students' inexhaustible energy—their stories, interests, passions—will fuel the learning environment" (Fletcher and Portalupi 37). The writers' workshop learning environment is energetic and exciting for students and teachers alike, and the format works well for middle school students.

> A workshop approach benefits adolescents by affording them the responsibility and autonomy they're ready to begin assuming as they approach adulthood. The workshop uniquely accommodates junior high students' social, physical, and intellectual needs; it provides a structure

> that keeps them on track, and an authoritative adult with whom they can discover the sense of reading and writing (Atwell 18).

"Is writing workshop the only way to teach writing? Of course not…but none of them matches the writing workshop when it comes to growing strong writers" (Fletcher and Portalupi xi).

CHAPTER III

Data Collection Process

"Does instruction in Writers' Workshop help students to be more effective and detailed writers?"

The following will provide information concerning the participants, procedures, data collection tools, and data collection used in the action research of the above Capstone question.

Participants

My two eighth grade English classes were the focus for my Capstone project. Each class was approximately fifty minutes in length, and both classes met in the afternoon.

One class (fifth hour) had thirty-four total students—nineteen girls and fifteen boys. The other class (sixth hour) had twenty-seven students—thirteen girls and fourteen boys. From each class, I randomly selected five girls and five boys to compare their writing samples before Writers' Workshop and after Writers' Workshop. When I randomly selected students for my research, I did not take into account any factors such as race, socioeconomic status, grades, or special services the students may or may not have received.

Procedures

I introduced Writers' Workshop to my two English classes at the end of October 2001. I explained that Writers' Workshop was a time in which they would write on topics of their choice and at a pace of their choice. I explained that the process they used to write was up to them; I was not going to dictate that each student prewrite, write, revise, rewrite, and edit in that order. I stressed that each one of them needed to write using a style that fit his/her individual needs. I told them that they would write in workshop one to three times a week, and I would require them to write for twenty to thirty minutes or read a book of their choice if they were stuck in their writing.

I told them that I would meet with each of them individually to help them with their writing and that they also would work with each other to help each other. I went over the policies and procedures for workshop and made a poster for the room with lists of the policies and procedures. These items included grades for workshop, student materials, teacher materials, the purpose of workshop, student requirements, teacher requirements, workshop responses for what students were working on, and an example of the writing records (Appendix A1 – A7). After I explained the procedures, they decorated their portfolios, made writing record sheets, and chose notebooks to use as Writers' Notebooks in which they wrote all of their pieces.

It took two class periods for me to give my students the overview of Writers' Workshop, and by the time I finished explaining everything to them, they were ready to write.

My English students completed two "rounds" of Writers' Workshop. The first "round" started in November. They had Writers' Workshop one to two times a week until mid-December. At that time, they participated in workshop three times a week until mid-January (Winter break fell into that time period also.). Their first completed piece was due January 18. I let them write anything they wanted—fictional stories, poems, personal stories, etc. During the first "round," I was able to figure out what worked well and what I needed to improve for Workshop. I realized that I needed to create consistent classroom routines for the students. I also learned that I needed to modify my conferences with students; I spent too much time with each student and found it difficult to meet with all of them.

By the time we had our second go at Writers' Workshop from April 8 to May 6, we all had a better handle on Workshop procedures. For the second "round," each student had to work on a personal narrative, but he/she chose the topic based on his/her personal experiences. The personal narrative was one of their Profiles of Learning, and each eighth grade student was required to turn one in.

I had permission to use students' work, and I always knew whose paper I was reading. All students were aware of my research, but no one knew whose work I used for my data collection.

Data Collection Tools

On September 20, 2001, I asked each student in my English classes to write a personal narrative. I explained that a personal narrative was a story about one event that had happened to them. I did not ask them to write in detail but simply asked them to write a personal narrative. I collected all of them and kept them for the school year. I used those first personal narratives to compare to their second personal narratives they wrote from April to May using Writers' Workshop.

After I collected the first narratives, I randomly selected five boys and five girls from each class (for a total of ten boys and ten girls) and made copies of their narratives. Theirs were the ones I used for my comparison of data later in the year—

the first narrative without Writers' Workshop compared to the second narrative with Writers' Workshop.

Collecting the narratives prior to instruction in Writers' Workshop allowed me the opportunity to compare their writing products—one without Writers' Workshop instruction and one with Writers' Workshop instruction—thus providing an answer to my research question. I wanted to see if using Workshop helped them to become more effective and detailed writers, and looking at two different pieces of writing showed me the changes and improvements in their writing.

I also collected several other pieces of data. On the Status of the Class sheets, I recorded daily what they were working on (draft one, revising, conferencing, etc.). These sheets allowed me to track my students' writing process, and I was able to see whether or not they were making progress in their work.

When I conferenced with students, I wrote comments on the Skills Used Correctly/Skills to Perfect sheets. Each student had his/her own skills sheet and was supposed to write comments about what we discussed during conferences as well. These sheets also helped me track their progress and changes they made in their writing.

When students conferenced with each other, they filled out Peer Conference Sheets. They wrote concerns the writer had, suggestions to address the concerns, and what the writer would do to improve the piece after the conference. These helped students to focus during their conferences. They also helped me to see what they worked on together.

I also used Exit Slips several times to guide short conferences when students needed help with specific issues. I asked students to fill out Exit Slips at the end of class, and I told them to write any concerns they had about their narratives. I read all of them at the end of the day, and I used their concerns to guide my instruction the following class periods. On one set of Exit Slips, about half the class wanted help with adding detail to their narratives. The next day, I presented a mini-lesson to help them add details and description. I also used the Exit Slips to address specific individual concerns.

When the students turned in the final draft of their narratives, they completed a Student Self-Evaluation. They assessed and graded themselves based on their effort and participation during Writers' Workshop. Their responses to the question "What have you learned from having worked on this piece?" were insightful to me.

The last piece of data I collected was a Writers' Workshop Evaluation. Because I never had taught using Writers' Workshop before, I wanted my students' opinions about workshop—how it was different from how they usually wrote, what they liked about the format of workshop, how it helped them improve their writing, what they learned from using workshop, and if they would want to use Writers' Workshop again. The evaluations were extremely valuable in my assessment of Writers' Workshop's influence on students' writing.

At the time I randomly chose the students for my research, I did not know them very well, so I did not have any biases for or against them. I made sure I talked to each student one time as he/she worked on his/her personal narrative. I did meet with some students more than others; therefore, some students received more help from me. I also did not regulate how much peer assistance each student received; some may have had more peer help than others.

Circumstances other than Writers' Workshop could have influenced students' writing. Writing simply could have been a strength of some of the students in the study, and some students, perhaps, may have written more than others on their own. These two student-controlled factors could have impacted their final pieces. In addition, there were many classroom events that may have influenced the quality of the students' final pieces. When they wrote their first personal narrative, I had not given them any instruction about the elements of a narrative or story. By the time they wrote their second narratives, we had discussed the elements of a narrative and figurative language. They also had read an autobiographical novel, a fictional novel, and fiction and non-fiction stories; they had been exposed to and had discussed different types of literature. They wrote their second narratives much later in the school year than their first ones; therefore, they had more knowledge about strong, effective writing. The first narrative they wrote was on the spot, and for the second one, they worked for about a month. They had the freedom to change topics if theirs was not working; they did not have that freedom with their first piece.

Based on the data I collected, it is extremely difficult to assess if instruction in and the use of Writers' Workshop helped students write stronger personal narratives, if the numerous factors previously mentioned helped them to write stronger personal narratives, or if it was a combination of these factors that led to improved writing ability. Due to some of the limitations of my study, my data collection and results may not be enough to convince a skeptic of the value of Writers' Workshop. I did, however, observe many benefits of teaching writing through workshop format as opposed to the traditional method of teaching writing at the front of the classroom with little regard for individual needs.

Data Collection

The two classes that used Writers' Workshop met in the afternoons, every day of the week. My fifth hour class had thirty-four students, and my sixth hour class had twenty-seven students. I randomly selected ten girls and ten boys and made copies of both of their narratives.

I collected the first personal narrative on September 20, 2002. The students wrote the first narratives entirely one their own without help from anyone else in one class period. I did not give them any instruction about writing a personal narrative; I simply told them to write a paper about one incident in their lives.

I collected the second personal narrative on May 6, 2002, after instruction in Writers' Workshop. At the time I collected the second narratives, the students had used Writers' Workshop for approximately nine weeks. The principle focus of my instruction at that time was writing the personal narrative. Therefore, students wrote three to four days a week during that time.

After a bit of trial and error, each class period was structured the same. I started with a mini-lesson or read-aloud. Then I gave the students five minutes of talk time to discuss their writing (and to get talking out of their systems). After talk time, I filled out the Status of the Class sheets and asked each student what he/she would work on that day in class. After the status check, the room was to be quiet for workshop. During workshop time in class, students wrote individually, conferenced with peers, and conferenced with me. If they were stuck in their writing, they read a book instead.

I wrote on the Skills Used Correctly/Skills to Perfect sheets when I conferenced with students. I met with each student at least three times throughout the course of workshop time. I used the Exit Slips to talk to students about their writing concerns as well. I used Exit Slips three times during workshop.

Students filled out Peer Conference sheets when they worked with other students. The number of times they conferenced with other students was up to them, but they had to fill out one of these sheets each time they met with someone. I collected the conference sheets each day.

When students turned in the final drafts of their narratives, they filled out a Student Self-Evaluation on which they assessed their effort and participation in Writers' Workshop. They also assigned a grade for themselves based on their efforts and evaluations of themselves. I also asked each student to complete a Writers' Workshop Evaluation when he/she turned in his/her final draft. I asked them general questions about workshop—what they liked about it and suggestions for improvement. Their opinions were an extremely valuable piece of my assessment of using Writers' Workshop to teach writing.

All of the data I collected (Status of the Class sheets, Skills Used Correctly/Skills to Perfect sheets, Exit Slips, Peer Conference evaluations, and student self-evaluations) contributed to showing students' progress in their writing throughout the year. The two narratives I collected were the main focus of my data collection, but I found that all the other pieces completed the puzzle of their progress. Writing quality work is time-consuming, and the data shows all the steps, procedures, and effort each student put into his/her writing.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

Process

I collected two personal narratives from the twenty random students. I read their first narratives (Appendix B1 – B10) and their second narratives (Appendix C1 – C10) and compared the two. I consistently found that the second narratives had more detail and were written more effectively with correct paragraph format.

For the first narratives they wrote, I did not meet with them to help them improve their pieces, nor did they meet with other students to improve their pieces. For the second narratives, I met with each student at least once to discuss his/her piece. I also casually talked to as many students as I could about their writing as they worked. Students met with each other as well. They worked on their second narratives for four weeks with writing time three to four days a week in class. In addition, they were to write for homework three to four days a week. They had significantly more time to improve their second narratives; their first ones were on-demand writings.

I used a checklist to score the final drafts of the personal narratives. The students received the checklists when they first began work on their second narratives; they knew exactly what I was looking for in their papers. They used the checklists to self-evaluate their own papers, and peers used them to peer-evaluate their papers as well.

Critiquing writing is extremely subjective; each person has his/her own opinion of what effective writers and detailed writers are. But my definitions help to clarify key points of my research. Detailed writers used figurative language (similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, etc.) and imagery in their work. I was able to accurately measure their use of these techniques by reading their two different narratives and comparing the details in both.

Results

Initially to determine my results, I was only going to look at the two personal narratives I collected. However, by including the other data collection tools in my assessment, I gained a more complete understanding of how students need to work on writing as a process as opposed to just a product.

I used the first personal narrative as a control to which to compare the narrative with workshop instruction. However, the first narrative was not a sufficient control for the research. The students wrote the first and second narratives in entirely different settings with much more time to write the second narratives. They also wrote the two pieces at different times in the school year—one at the beginning and one toward the end.

In analyzing the data, the second narratives incorporated much more detail into the stories than the first narratives. Of the twenty random selections, the first narratives were one page to one and a half pages, and the second narratives ranged from two to nine pages. The students recognized more description in their own writing as well. Many commented on their Writers' Workshop evaluations that workshop improved their writing because they were able to slow down and take the time to add literary tools and details.

Effective writers identified weaknesses, worked to become self-directed writers, and referred to their notes and Skills sheets to improve their writing. This is a bit more difficult to accurately assess, but I used several items to monitor their writing progress. All of the following helped me to track their writing progress and improvement: Status of the Class sheets, Skills Used Correctly/Skills to Perfect sheets, Exit Slips, Peer Conference evaluations, and student self-evaluations. I witnessed their writing progression through various stages—draft one, revising, draft two, conferencing, and then editing. They worked through the stages of writing naturally without my telling them to follow a particular order or pattern. The Status of the Class sheets showed their progress on paper, and I witnessed it firsthand in class. They actively worked to improve their writing. They did not want me to take up class time with mini-lessons; they wanted the entire time to write. They read each other's pieces and praised each other, they were excited about what they were working on, and they really *wanted* to improve their pieces. Though I cannot prove their energetic attitudes about writing statistically, I did witness writing enthusiasm for the first time in my teaching career.

Though it was difficult for me to accurately assess if their writing improvement was a result of Writers' Workshop or if it was a result of other variables such as their maturity, their personal well-being, or other similar factors beyond the scope of my research, using Writers' Workshop did improve students' writing. They had the time to get valid feedback from me and from other students, and they also had the time to work to refine their writing. My students put forth a great deal of effort and enjoyed writing more than they have in the past with the traditional method of large group instruction with most of the writing assigned as homework.

In all fairness, other factors may have contributed to students becoming more effective and detailed writers. Some students naturally are strong writers, and some students write more frequently than others do. In addition, they wrote their first narratives very early in the school year without prior instruction; whereas, they wrote their second narrative toward the end of the school year after reading many types of literature, studying grammar and usage, and learning about personal narratives. Their second narratives could have been better simply because they had a more broad knowledge base on which to rely.

Instruction in Writers' Workshop may not have had any bearing on students' writing progress; other factors may have influenced the final result. However, the end results of Writers' Workshop demonstrated students' significant writing growth and development. Writers' Workshop—the procedures and the atmosphere—lends itself to the opportunity for quality writing.

If I had asked whether or not students would like to use Writers' Workshop to write, I would have had excellent research results. They truly enjoyed using workshop to write. Following are some responses to the question, "Would you want to use Writers' Workshop in the future? Why or why not?"

> "I would love to do Writers' Workshop again, because it got me back into the spirit of writing."
>
> "Yes, I would love to use Writers' Workshop in the future. I think it has improved my writing and I want to see how far it can take me."
>
> "Yes, I would like to use Writers' Workshop in the future because it is a good method to learn how to write good stories."

"Yes, it helps me write better, and it was fun."

"I would because I believe my story is better quality than my other ones."

In evaluating my data, I realized that my results really fit the question, "How does instruction in Writers' Workshop help students to improve their writing?" I found many answers to that question.

*Students naturally progressed through the stages of writing without my telling them they had to follow a certain pattern (draft one, revise, conference, draft two, edit, etc.).

*They wrote longer pieces which usually included more details.

*Students worked on their pieces until they were happy with them.

*They worked diligently to edit their pieces and remove errors.

*They seemed to care more about their work than they did when writing a paper with strict time parameters; they invested more energy as was demonstrated by their desire to work for an extensive period of time voluntarily.

*They appreciated having time in class to work and to ask me and others for help rather than working by themselves at home.

*They liked the freedom of choosing their own topics and changing their topics if they were stuck.

*They enjoyed workshop time and looked forward to it.

The evaluations were extremely valuable in my assessment of Writers' Workshop. Almost every single student enjoyed workshop and said he/she would want to use it in the future. Their positive responses validated my use of Writers' Workshop to teach writing.

The students responded well to the workshop format, and I definitely saw writing growth compared to my previous years of teaching without workshop. Using Writers' Workshop was the most effective method I have used to teach writing to eighth graders to date. Writers' Workshop motivated eighth graders to write well, and that speaks volumes in and of itself.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

In addition to learning the benefits of using the workshop format in my classes, I learned better management tools to use during workshop. I also learned a format for workshop that worked well for each class period—mini-lesson, student talk time, status of the class, and writing time. I also found that the Exit Slips worked much better and were more efficient for conferencing than the individual Skills Sheets I used to use. The Exit Slips were easier to use and manage than the alphabetized Skills Sheets. In addition, I realized that students need more than two conference areas in the room to work with each other. I will make those changes to improve Writers' Workshop for future students.

I highly recommend that all teachers of writing use Writers' Workshop in their classes. Students really like the format and are motivated to perfect their pieces.

In analyzing all the data I collected and in reflecting on using Writers' Workshop, I feel that workshop is a positive, productive environment in which students can write. Instruction in Writers' Workshop *does* help students improve their writing. *All* writers grow when given the opportunity to determine what they wish to write, have the time to reflect, and the desire to revise. Writers' Workshop provides students with the time in class to do just that.

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Writers' Workshop Grades

Grades and points will be based on the following:

Bringing materials/tools for workshop

Being on task

Progressing and putting forth effort in your writing

Self-evaluating using provided rubrics

Conferencing with the teacher

Perfecting work and turning it in on assigned due dates unless you have special permission from the teacher

Note:

Pieces may be rewritten as many times as the student wishes.

Writers' Workshop Materials

Student Materials

Portfolio

Decorated cover to represent the author

Completed works

Dated and labeled self and teacher evaluations

Writing section of binder

Writing Ideas

Skills Used Correctly/Skills to Perfect

Writer's Notebook

Drafts, additions, deletions, revisions

SAVE EVERYTHING

Teacher Materials

Conference Notebook

Date of conference

Title of piece

Skills taught

Writing strengths

Work in progress or final draft

Status of the Class

What you are working on

Writers' Workshop

Purpose: Students will actively participate in writing through...

Writing a lot!

Picking your own topics

Setting goals for your writing

Working to improve your writing through self-evaluating, conferencing, and editing

Taking risks as a writer

Writing a lot!

Students are required to...

Come to class with all materials.

Write or read a book during workshop.

Find topics you care about.

Take risks with your writing.

Always be on task.

Work quietly.

Provide thoughtful, helpful comments to peers.

Conference in areas provided.

Type final drafts.

The teacher is required to...

Keep track of your writing and what you need.

Guide you through the three Profiles of Learning–personal narrative, three opinion paragraphs, and technical writing.

Prepare and present lessons based on what I see you need to know.

Help you find topics you care about.

Provide a predictable class setting in which you will feel free to take risks as a writer.

Help you learn specific proofreading and editing skills.

Be your final editor.

Listen to you and respond to your writing by asking thoughtful, helpful questions; help you listen and respond to other writers' pieces in thoughtful, helpful ways.

Make sure no one does anything to disturb or distract you.

Possible Writers' Workshop Activity Responses

New topic

Prewriting
(brainstorming, researching, interviewing, determining the purpose and audience for a piece)

Draft #___ (working on draft #1, draft #2, etc.)

Conferencing (peer or teacher)

Revising

Editing (self, peer, teacher)

Researching how others write

Completing final draft

Abandoning

Typing

Appendix A 7

Name

Writing Record

Date	Title of Piece	Skills Used Correctly	Skills to Perfect

Personal Narrative

One specific event I will remember is when I went to Valleyfair with my best friend, Erica Bisbey, and her family.

When we parked in the lot, I got out of the car and looked up- The Wild Thing. I had silently been telling myself the whole ride to Valleyfair that it was just a ride. Thousand of people go on it everyday and nothing happens. But no matter what I told myself, I was just not a rollercoaster person.

We walked through the gates and entered the park. "Let's go on The Wild Thing!" Erica said as we neared the loading area for the ride.

"No, I'm not going on it," I said, embarrassed. "You go ahead." After much dilliberation, Erica went on it and I stayed on the ground.

Lunchtime came and went and I still hadn't gone on it. "Just ride it once. I know you'll love it!" Erica pleaded.

"Fine. I'm going to go. I'm going to have to do it sooner or later," I said uncertainly.

The next thing I knew, I was strapped into the seat of The Wild Thing. "I can't believe I'm doing this," I told Erica as we chugged up the hill. We got to the top and the ride slowed. Erica put her hands up and I gripped the seat in front of me. We tilted over the edge of the drop and the car dropped down.

When the ride was over, I got out of the car and said "You're right. That was awesome!"

We went on it five more times that day including two times when it was raining. (It hurt when the rain whips

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in your face, but it was still fun.) I'm now proud to say, I am very much so a rollercoaster person!

Personal Narrative

About seven years ago my friend and I joined Tae Kwon Do. We had seen people use karate on TV, and we thought it would be cool to be able to use it too.

Tae Kwon Do is divided in eleven belts, or levels. At each level you get a different belt to wear on your uniform. At each belt you have to memorize a form, or routine of moves. Learning and memorizing the forms came very easy to me. When I was on purple belt (6th belt) at practice one day the instructor was reviewing the form with the class and I was getting very bored because I already knew the form My mom was in the back of the room watching and I turned towards her and said, "This is B-O-R-I-N- My mom and the instructor got really mad. After practice my mom had me tell the instructor that I was out of line and very wrong. I haven't done anything like that since.

I continued with Tae Kwon Do and made it up to black belt (11th belt). I have never had to use Tae Kwon Do on anyone.

I Knew it would be a bad, icky day because I got woken up by a thunderstorm. It turned out not to be such a bad day, but that's what I thought. On went the rest of the week not a care in my mind. Then came sunday when I went with my dad.

We were driving around trying to find the chinese restruant my dad's girlfriend ordered. Nothi seemed out of the ordinary, but the back sea looked awfully hairy. I thought nothing of just thinking they must have broughten Thor to the vet. Well it was a beautiful day until I got out of the car. That was when he decided to tell me Thor was put to sleep. I'm guessing he told me then so I wouldn't be searching the hous for him, like one their of friends did.

I was so heart broken it was hard to breath and I was mad because they Knew I loved that dog and didn't even call me or anything. I didn't even get to say good-bye. I didn't Know why or when, jus that he was gone.

It turned out thursday really was my bad day. Thor was scared of storms and my dads girlfriend can let him out to go to the [illegible] room. Then my dad woke up and wondered where Thor wa [illegible] [illegible] couldn't find him. So he looked out

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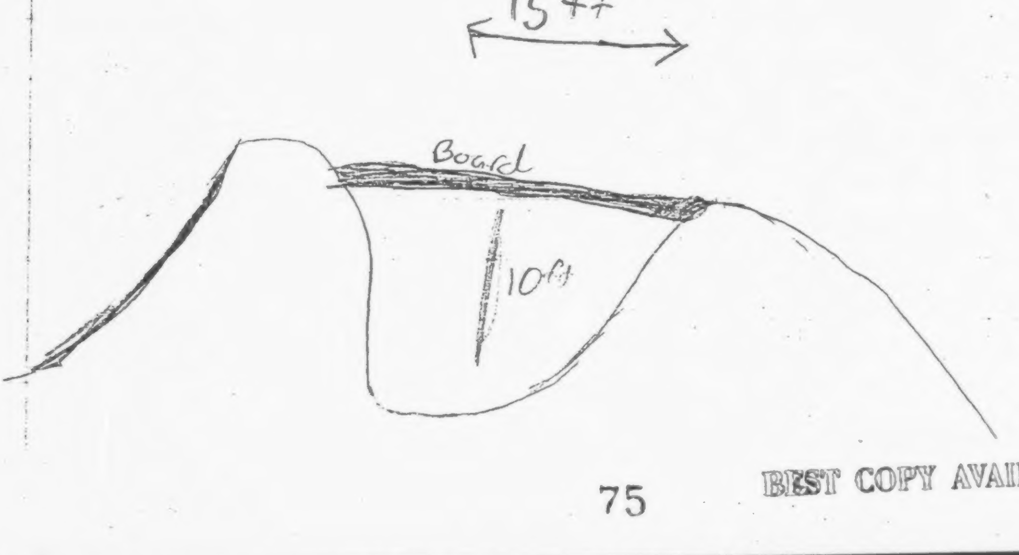
side and he was under a tree, and couldn't
move because his back legs gave out. Befor
they brought him to the vet. they gave him
his favorite food: jelly toast.

My Big Embarasment

The most emberasing thing that has ever happened to me actually happened last night. A couple friends and I were out Biking on out track of jumps and we were all having fun and talking. I pedaled my bike up slowly to the top of one of the Jumps. It was about teen feet tall and it was just two piles of dirt with a board on the top. I coasted my bike up onto the board. I wasn't paying attention to what I was doing and I started talki and got distracted. I was on the verry right edge of the board (which I didn't know) and I put my right foot down to sit up there and talk, but there was nothing to put my foot on and I just fell off.



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Personal Narrative

One of my family traditions is every Memorial Day we go to the Indy 500. It wa a tradition that was started by my Grandpa De But last year was my favorite because I got to go with my two older cousins. Andrew is in college and Tyler is an 11 grader at JM.

We got to the track abou two hour early so we could walk around a little. Bu thats not what my cousins had in mind. I thought we would go see gasoline alley but instead we went and looked at th pits. To get there we had to sneak in a gate. Tyer really likes Al unser Jr. so we had to see this pit. They both knew how much I liked Sara fisher so they said we could see her pit too. But there w a fenes blocking of the top 15 cars a she was the 16th car. You would think we would just turn around go back but we didn't. We hopped the fense.

I didn't stop there my cousin were detrimened to get on pit road and they di I stayed by the gate and go to see everybody. From Sara Fisher to Steven Tyler. My cousin got to see Al unser Jr. ge in his car and got to wish Roger Pen good luck.

And you know what Roger Penske got first and second in the race

Personal Narrative

During our vacation my aunt came over with her pondone so we went on the lake we where at on her pontone. We Looked at the ski the islands and alot of other stuff when all of asudden the clouds turned black but wasn't going towards us it was going passed us so we Keeped going. after a while I asked my aunt where we were going and then every body looked at the clouds and they had started Rolling towards. They would go from the left and then Ran into the clouds coming from the Right then go towards us. Every-body freaked and my aunt turned towards are cabin and was going as fast as she could meanwhile the boat was taking on water from the waves. We got to the dock and Ran right into it and go stuck and the Ponton couldn't be hucked onto the dock because they waves where so high. So we had to get every body of the boat get my Dads and my aunts boat on shore. we did that and me and my dad helped 2 other boats come back from the water and Dock. we succesfuly did that and went back to the cabin

my aunts
my dads boat

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socked from head to toe. the next day my aunt went back home on the boat and we had to get one of the pontons off Land, I Coundn't believe 1 whole ponton was Lifted onto the sand. The 2 speed boats had a couple of broken parts but not bad, my dad's boat and my auits was fine, the bran new Dock had 2 hole where the pontons hit.

Personal
Narrative

Trips.

Some of the trip around the usa. I have seen both sees Pacific and Alantic. I saw the Atlantic when I was visiting my great aunt in Washington D.C. My trip to the pacific visited my great anut and great uncle the living in washinton the sate. Anther trip I took was a train to holden villagl in washingston the sate. I also have visited my great uncle in Lounden, Ohio. This last summer I wint to canton ohio to vist my moms old Doctor while we were there I visited the football hallafame and the rockand roll hall of fame. Seeing the John lenmen bay bew. On our way back we steped in Decalb IL to vist an old paitent the was seeing my moms doctor. I have been to the black hill and to Monut rushmore.

The Bet

As many people know, I am a Vikings fan. The Green Bay Packers is a swear word to me.

Last year I had Mrs. Magnuson as my English teacher and she was a Packer fan. So one day I made a bet with her. I bet that the Vikings would beat the Packers in the December game. She accepted my bet and we decided that the loser would have to wear the other team's shirt.

Every season, my family gets together for the Vikings vs. Packers game. I called my aunt and asked her to bring a Packer shirt for the 1-1000 chance that the Packers beat the Vikings.

My family showed up at my house and we watched the humiliating game. Then, my aunt took a picture of me in the Packer shirt and now she can blackmail me.

I was suppose to wear the shirt to school the next Monday but we had a snow day so I had to wear it to school on Tuesday.

Just to rub it in on Tuesday, Mrs. Magnuson stopped the class and announced to everyone that I had lost the bet.

Personal Narrative

When I was about five years old, my grandparents came over a lot. One particular time, when my grandparents were leaving. I decided to show off and ride my plastic horse with wheels down the driveway. Just as they pulled out of the driveway, I fell off the plastic horse face first, hit my chin on the ground and bit my tongue really hard. I still have a scar on my tongue from this tragedy.

* * *

When I was about 6 I used to sleep walk. One night while I was sleepwalking, I was trying to go to my parents room, but I opened the wrong door. It was the laundry chute door and I fell down, down, down. I was little so I didn't think it would ever end. Finally, it did. I was crying and my parents came down and got me out. I didnt sleepwalk since then.

Personal Narithve
Big Storm

I was spending the night at my best friends house. We got this idea that we would set up her tent and sleep outside. Her mom and dad were conserned about the weather, but they let us sleep outside anyway. Right before I went to sleep the storm hight. Thunder an lightning galor. I feel asleep and when I woke up it was raining. We had to put the tent and every thing else away in the rain and we were in a feild 600 yards away. That part was not fun.

Talent Show Tryouts

Tuesday, April 9, 2002 9:42 p.m.

With excited hands, I pulled back the covers on my bed and slipped under them. I laid down, fully expecting to be asleep in a matter of minutes. But as soon as my head hit the pillow, it was if someone had flipped on the radio. The melody filled my mind, the words playing right alongside the music. The song flowed along, only to return and repeat itself again.

Having that song run through my head over and over was better than being nervous, though. The past week had been awful. Every time I had the slightest thought about tryouts, I would feel sick to my stomach. I had even considered not doing it at all, but I knew I couldn't let down Erica and Stacey like that.

Besides, I had thought, *playing in the talent show isn't just about playing in the talent show*. What I really wanted to do was show everyone that we *could* play well, that we weren't just some girls doing this for attention. I wanted to show them that we could be just as good as any other band out there.

Eventually, I forced my imaginary radio off, or at least to turn the volume down. I couldn't believe it. I wasn't nervous at all. Not that it wasn't a relief. I had never really been relaxed over the idea of performing for the student council, even if some of the people on it were my friends. I could just picture their expressionless faces, their eyes boring into me...

But that was in the past, and if my mind had finally eluded the wrenching feeling of nervousness, I wanted to enjoy that time. For I feared it could conquer my thoughts again without a moment's notice.

As the last words of the song faded away, so did my consciousness, and a much welcomed deep sleep overcame me.

Wednesday, April 10, 2002 7:31 a.m.

With toothpaste bubbling in my mouth, thoughts of the talent show tryouts invaded my mind once again. But my blockade held fast, keeping back the nervousness.

It was the day of tryouts, yet it seemed just like any other day. I had gone through the usual morning routine. I had eaten the same kind of breakfast, worn the same kind of clothes, and gotten the same amount of sleep. Nothing was different.

Nothing was different, save the fact that our tryout that afternoon was the only chance we had to make the talent show, to accomplish what we had worked so hard for, to show everyone that we *could* play.

Erica had told me before, "We don't have to prove anything to anyone." It was true, of course. I had thought about the same thing many times. I figured that if we were going to perform, we should do it for ourselves and no one else. But even though that was decided in my mind, part of me still wanted to change people's thoughts about the quality of our music.

That was the only problem with being a girl band. No one thought we could do it. The other two bands trying out had only guy members. They, along with everyone else, might say, "Good luck at tryouts," but their expressions revealed their doubt.

Before I left for school, I checked one last time to make sure that my bass guitar, cord, and tuner were all inside my gig bag and sitting by my amp, ready for my mom to drop off at school at 2:30.

I shouted a quick good-bye to my parents as I hoisted my backpack onto my shoulders and slipped out the door. I jogged down the front steps and sprinted across the street.

Same breakfast, same clothes, same sleep, same time. *Yep*, I thought, *just like any other day. I'm late again.*

I speed-walked through the wet field and into the school parking lot. My freshly mud-splattered shoes trotted up to the heavy brown door. I took a deep breath, gripped the handle, and entered into one of the most exciting days of my life.

7:45 a.m.

As I slid my notebooks and color-coded folders underneath the stiff black seat of my chorus chair, I tried desperately to think of anything but our performance after school. I wasn't scared or worried about it. I just didn't want to dwell on it.

Just then, Erica shuffled uncertainly in. I strode down to greet her. A kid in the class was giving everyone some background music by playing a tune on the electric keyboard and using the distortion pedal to change all the notes into unnatural pitches.

I looked at Erica and, after a second, blurted out, "I'm not nervous. I'm cool. I'm done with being nervous."

8:22 a.m.

The transparency map of Mexico illuminated the dark Spanish room. My stomach began to feel strange -- like I was hungry. I knew that I wasn't, though. Lunch wasn't for over an hour.

Señora pointed to places on the map and explained about the beaches, the resorts, and the attractions. I wished I could be there. I wanted to be anywhere but at school, thinking about that afternoon.

My blockade had sprung a leak, and the nervousness was trickling in.

10:58 a.m.

My half-eaten baked potato stared up at me as I pushed my lunch tray away. Even though I had only nibbled at some of my food, I felt stuffed. I shifted my eyes from my unappetizing food up to Erica. She had barely touched her meal. Instead, she and Stacey were talking about how worried they were for that afternoon.

So much for not being nervous, I thought to myself. "I'm kind of getting nervous too," I repeated aloud. Our conversation continued on, and my lunch was forgotten.

12:02 p.m.

The boldfaced letters mixed together on the overhead screen to form a jumble of words that I had a hard time concentrating on.

"Embarrassing stories always make good personal narratives," Mrs. Kraske said, explaining our assignment. My mind tuned into her as she told of a mortifying basketball experience, but as soon as she finished, my thoughts drifted back to performing for the student council.

The feeling of sickness made me hunch over in my chair. I glanced to my left and found Erica in the same position as me. We gave each other knowing looks.

12:41 p.m.

I set my books on my desk and sat down. I pivoted in my seat to talk to Erica before class started, but saw Tanner first.

Tanner was the guitarist from one of the other bands that were trying out. His group had tried out the day before, and he seemed confident that they had done well.

"Are you nervous?" he asked with a smile on his face.

"Yeah," I replied, trying not to sound too worried.

"It's really scary when you get up on stage, and everyone is watching you," Tanner said jokingly.

"Thanks for the encouragement."

2:16 p.m.

The problems in my book could just as well have been written in Chinese. I wasn't thinking straight. I was able to get through a few equations without my mind being jerked back to the reality of what my friends and I were going to do. But then, my eyes darted to the clock. My focus was lost among my anxieties.

The only math that I was capable of doing the rest of the class was counting down the minutes until school let out.

Our scheduled tryout time was at 2:54. That meant that the we only had 38 mintues left.

When the bell rang, the sound resonated in my ears. The butterflies that had been fluttering around in my stomach were instantly transformed into huge boulders that came crashing down. I systematically closed my math book and gathered up the rest of my things. I gripped them tightly as Erica and I started off to find Stacey.

2:36 p.m.

Stacey strode up to me, twirling a drumstick in her fingers. She looked as relaxed as ever. She seemed to be mentally rehearsing our song as she waited for me to zip up my backpack.

"Let's go. My brother is bringing the drums. We have to go wait for him," Stacey said as I slammed my locker shut.

I turned to face her. "Where's Erica?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied, glancing both directions down the hallway. "Do you want to find her and meet me by the parking lot?"

"Sure," I said. Stacey gave a quick 'all right' and hurried toward the back entrance to the building. I found Erica easily, and together we made our way to where our families would be dropping off our instruments.

2:40 p.m.

Stacey's brow furrowed as she scanned the parking lot for her brother. I could understand her worry. I thought that maybe he had forgotten and wasn't going to come. I thought that Stacey wasn't going to have a drum set to use, and we'd have to cancel our tryout.

The idea of canceling our tryout would have appealed to me earlier in the day, but I didn't want to do that anymore. I wanted us to do our best. I wanted to make the talent show. But what if Stacey didn't have her drums? What if--

I was being paranoid. *Take a deep breath,* I told myself. But it was harder than I thought. The presumably soothing breath seemed opposed to calming me, so I tried to mask my apprehension by grabbing my amp and slinging my gig bag across my chest.

Erica saved me from my cheap attempt to appear ready to perform by saying, "I'm going to put this in the auditorium." She nodded toward her guitar.

"Me too," I announced quickly. I followed Erica inside. With every step I took, my amp got heavier and heavier. After finally finding the right door to the auditorium stage, we entered, trying not to bump our equipment into everything that we passed. I almost stumbled as my foot found the sudden slope of the tiles as they led upward to the varnished platform.

I walked slowly out, my wide eyes searching our audience for familiar faces. Not only did I find some of my friends, I found that there weren't that many people looking back at me. *Maybe this won't be so bad*, I thought, not completely believing myself.

I smiled at my waving friends and rested the neck of my guitar against a chest of play props. After making sure that it was balanced and would not fall, I strode calmly out of the theater. But as soon as I was out of the line of vision of the student council, my pace quickened, and I hurried through the door and into the main hallway. Stacey was there, seeming a bit overwhelmed with the two large drum pieces in her arms. But the casual look on her face suggested otherwise.

How can she not be nervous? I questioned myself. At lunch, she had said that she was, but it certainly didn't seem like it now. Either Stacey was completely ready for this, or she was a very good actress.

After all the pieces were transferred into the auditorium, Stacey and her brother began assembling them. And assembling them. And assembling them. It was like watching a building being erected. I was more of a spectator than a worker. I didn't know the first thing about setting up drums. The student council kept me busy for a while, though, with their questions on how to spell the name of our band.

"C-R-A-Z-Y A-N-T-I-C-S," I said.

"A-N-what?" I repeated myself, louder this time.

After I ran out of ideas of things to do make it look like I actually knew what I was doing with the metal rods of the drums, I decided to make myself useful and went to tune my guitar. I gently laid my gig bag on the floor and traced the path of the zipper with my finger, searching for the tiny metal fingerhold. I found it and slid it around the contour of the case. I took my shiny red bass from its padded confinement and carefully maneuvered my way to a standing position.

I cleared off a place to sit on top of the prop chest and grabbed my tuner. My hands trembled as I attempted to remove the tuner from the box. I couldn't get my fingers to open the cardboard flap, and my frustration mounted. Finally, I shook the electronic device out, nearly dropping it. *Relax*, I told myself. *Relax? How can I relax? This is one of the biggest things I've ever done.*

I was one of those people who was kind of quiet and set back. I was never that outgoing. I wasn't like some of my friends. I wasn't the president of the student council, the lead in the school play, or a track-runner for the high school team. I wanted to gain self-confidence and *be* that outgoing person. And where better to start than the school talent show?

3:15 p.m.

Erica and I stood up front with the red lights on our amps indicating that they were on. I glanced at the clock and calculated how far behind schedule we had put everyone.

"Are there any acts after us?" Erica asked the audience, reading my mind.

"There's five," someone answered. The microphones crackled to life, and Mr. Henkle asked if we were ready.

Preparation wise? Sure we were. We had practiced the song so many times that we were beginning to get sick of it. But me personally? Not by a long-shot. I suddenly became aware of the nervousness that was surging through my body. I also remembered that my parents, Erica's mom and brother, and Stacey's brother were all standing off to the side of the stage, listening. My dad had said it was too loud to hear through the doors upstairs, so they had snuck in the lower entrance.

We all looked at each other, making sure that everyone was 'ready' to play. I gave them a little smile and tried to appear confident. Stacey seemed nonchalant and eager to start. Erica took a deep breath and raised her pick to the strings.

Her G-5 chord rang clearly, sounding throughout the entire auditorium. Her hand darted around, plucking out the introduction to our song on the thin wires. The steady staccato of Stacey's drums entered. And then my part came.

"Finally I figured o-out, but it to-ok a long, lo-ong ti-ime," I sang, hoping I wasn't so close to the microphone that I would make my voice explode from the speakers and hurt everyone's ears. Luckily, I was just the right distance away from it. The rest of the verse passed, and we made a smooth transition into the pre-chorus. "There's been ti-i-mes."

"I'm so co-on-fused," Erica echoed. Except I couldn't hear her. I shifted my eyes in her direction, trying not to draw attention to my bewilderment. *Why can't I hear her? Shouldn't I be* *able to hear her?* After she sang another line, I decided that it must just be a weird technical side effect of me standing by a microphone too, so I kept going. But Erica didn't.

An awkward jumble of notes from her guitar hung in the air as Stacey and I realized there was a problem. A million thoughts raced through my mind. *Why did she stop? Will we be able to start over? Will this mean that we won't make the talent show?*

"I can't hear myself," Erica said, her voice still without amplification.

"What?" asked someone in the audience.

"I can't hear myself," Erica repeated. Mrs. Cassman went up to the audio booth. Mr. Henkle came up on stage to check her microphone.

"Hello?" he tested. "Can you guys hear me?" The student council responded with nods of their heads. He moved over to mine. "Hello?" he tried again. The speaker pumped out his voice.

"Well," he said, as he rejoined Erica, "Adrienne's is a bit louder, but," he leaned closer to the microphone, "I think Erica needs to sing closer to the mic." He said the last part in an announcer's voice, and it reminded me of a DJ on a radio station.

Mr. Henkle left the platform, and we all took our places once more. Erica strummed through the introduction again, and I began singing. I got through the verse and moved into the pre-chorus. "There's been ti-i-mes."

"I'm so co-on-fused," Erica followed, making sure to stand nearer to the mic than she had before.

The farther into the song we got, the less nervous I became, and the more the student council got into it. I tried to remember to smile and look around at everyone. As my eyes continuously scanned the people, I saw them grinning, tapping their toes to the beat, and singing the words along with us. Seeing all of them enjoying our music made me feel great.

"It's a-all for yo-ou," I sang as I hit the last note on my bass. It was over. We had done it! Our judges clapped and shouted compliments from their seats. The boulders that had once occupied my stomach were now being turned into sand and swept away by a huge flood of relief.

I bent down and snapped off my amp. I unplugged my guitar and wound up my cord. It was all I could do to keep from jumping up and down. I was so proud of our band.

I lifted my amp and hauled it off to the side of the stage where I was embraced by my beaming parents. Erica's mom hugged her and told her what an excellent job she had done.

As I packed up my equipment, I thought about what I had accomplished that day. I had done more than just try out for a school talent show. I had taken a risk, been adventurous, been outgoing. I had been the person I had always wanted to be.

"I Won't Say That Again"

"This is bull$%*&!" *Oops, that was a mistake. Shouldn't have said that. D#*$ how stupid can I be? I hope he didn't hear me. S!#@ he did. Why can't I stop swearing?*

"Yer outta here," the umpire bellowed.

"DUNFEE!" *S#@^, here it comes.* "DUNFEE! SIT DOWN!"

"But Mom. I didn't"

"I DON"T CARE." *I think she's mad.* "WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING?"

"I don't know." *Here come the tears.*

"WELL YOU JUST SIT HERE AND THINK ABOUT IT!"

* * *

This story starts a few days before that "incident". It was the weekend of July 4, 2000. My baseball team had a tournament in SPAM-Town, USA, Austin to be exact. *Not the most "luxurious" town.* Well, like I said, it was the dead of summer. *The weather was as beautiful as Britney Spears in a bikini.* It was warm, and very sunny all day.

Our first game was against Fond du Lac, Wisconsin who we were confident we could beat, even though we didn't know how good they were. *H#*^, they were from Wisconsin. How good could they be?*

Doing their best to humiliate us, two of their players hit homeruns, one of them hit two. They were the first homeruns hit off our pitchers all year, and it was kind of a shock. Needless to say, Fondi was a good team, and they narrowly edged us out for the win. *A Wisconsin team good? There's a first time for everything I guess.*

The next day our team played two games. I'm not sure where the teams were from, but they weren't the most "talented" players. *Oh, cummon, gimme a break. They were bad, terrible, horrible. Do you get the picture or do I also have to say they were horrendous, and despicable. They were warm sticks of butter, and we were the knife cutting through them with ease.* As you'd probably guess, we beat both of these teams… badly. In little league baseball, there's a rule called the "10-Run Rule". If one team is beating the other by ten or more runs at the end of an inning they automatically win. *H^*$, the way we were playing, we could have used a "20-Run Rule".*

Against one of the teams, Jerry Mock hit a homerun. It was awesome to see the ball sail through the air and over the neon orange fence. Jerry was the biggest, strongest, most powerful hitter on our team. *It wasn't a good idea to throw up and in on him.* Jerry was quite a bit over weight, but wasn't very slow for his size. He was always smiling too. Whether he was pitching, hitting, or riding to the game, Jerry was hardly ever in a bad mood.

In the other game David "The Gravedigger" Barajas ripped apart the other team's pitching. David is a guy who hits well against slow pitching, and that's what the other team had. His nickname is "The Gravedigger" for one, because he runs so very, very *extremely* slow. *He runs like a sloth.* Another reason, he digs these huge holes with his feet when he runs, and we say he's digging graves. *David is also "large", and I wouldn't advise you to call him "The Gravedigger" to his face. He doesn't know we call him that.*

Winning those two games was enough to get us out of our division and into the championship bracket. *More like showing up for those two games.* In our first game we played a Canadian team. *Did you know they had baseball in Canada?* They were actually pretty good, but we still pulled off a victory. To get to the championship game we had to win one more game, which we did later that day.

In the championship we had to play Fondi again. *Didn't see that one coming didya?* Our team was nervous, but we hadn't lost by much before, so we had some confidence.

The game was being played at the nicest field in the complex. It started good, with our team scoring a few runs, and shutting them down with our fielding. One of the runs was drove in by a screaming line drive I hit over the shortstop's head. The next few innings went by about normal, except for an ESPN-style diving play I had at shortstop. *Please, hold your applause.*

It was about the fifth inning when John Magee, the second batter in the lineup, stepped up to bat. The first pitch came in, and BANG, the pitch went out. The ball rolled all the way to the fence and John ended up with a triple. Then, the third base umpire called him out for not touching second base. Everyone had watched as John clearly stepped on second and continued to third, but he was still called out.

I was on deck, *the third hitter, the spot for the best hitter* and I was so mad that I yelled, "This is bull@$*#!" *Here's where the fun begins.*

"Yer outta here!" the umpire bellowed.

"DUNFEE!" *she doesn't sound happy* "DUNFEE! SIT DOWN!"

"But Mom, I didn't."

"I DON'T CARE! WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING?"

"I don't know."

"WELL YOU JUST SIT HERE AND THINK ABOUT IT!" *By then I was speechless, which would've come in handy about seven lines earlier.*

I sat there on the bench for a few minutes, crying. *I had dust in my eyes.* Our coach put Bryan Denisen into the game in my place. He was one of our better players, but hadn't been playing because his throwing elbow was sore from pitching. When my team went back out into the field I stayed on the bench and stopped crying. For the rest of the game I did my best to cheer on my teammates even as they started to fall apart. With his sore arm Bryan was forced to play first, not one of his normal positions. That was part of what screwed us up. *God D@$&%* it's my fault.*

In our last at bat in the top of the seventh inning *we don't play nine innings* we started coming back. We got a few men on base. Then Sam Schafer and Bryan each had a clutch hit to drive in a run, and those two runs gave us the lead. *Maybe it was good I got kicked out. H#%@, I'm not sure if I would've gotten a hit under that pressure.*

We ended up winning the game by one run, and we had won our first championship. *That's weight off my back.* Later on I heard my dad say that Fondi had only lost three games all year, and the losses had all been in the championship games of their tournaments. *Talk about chokers.*

Well, that's the end of the story. If you want to hear more about my team, then too bad, you can't.

Oh yeah, the moral of the story is: "Nothing umpires say is bull$%&#. *Even though I didn't get in trouble, I Won't Say That Again.*

Dealing with Death

" So what did he say now?" I asked sitting on the couch.

"Nothing yet," Stacey said, sitting on my computer chair typing away on Aol instant messenger. Stacey and I were trying to study for our science quiz, but like usual, we never really got anything done. It was like telling a little kid to do their homework with a big screen T.V. and video games. I mean, we always try to study, but we always get side tracked by one thing or another.

It was a very rainy, icky, Thursday, and I was happier than ever because soccer practice was cancelled. That meant that I got to watch all my favorite shows. I was psyched. Stacey even got to stay later, and we made pizza rolls.

"Ring, Ring," the phone said in a loud tone.

"I got it," I yelled, secretly hoping it was for me. "Hello?" I waited anxiously to see if someone was calling me.

"Hello Sib. It's Uncle Larry," he said.

"Ohhhh hi!!" I exclaimed.

"I was wondering if you had your dad's number?" Larry asked.

"Yeah, hold on I'll go get it," I said running up two flights of stairs. My muscles felt like I had run a mile. I climbed up on my chair to get the number.

"It's 289-0860," I said.

"Thanks Sib. Did you know Bob?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said, wondering what he was talking about.

"Yeah, well Bob died," Larry said.

"He did?" I was speechless. I didn't even think to ask how or when. All I could really think about was that he was gone.

After a long pause, I managed to say goodbye. The shock of the words, "Bob died," immobilized me to move. I woozily jumped off my chair feeling dizzy like when you are about to faint. I staggered down the stairs and tried to tell my mom he died. It took me two tries to get it out, because I started crying softly. I think my mom felt the way I did. The look on her face when I told her he died told me how she felt.

I just started bawling. It was like a waterfall of tears. I couldn't concentrate on studying, so I just cried. I have always heard people say that something was surreal. I never knew what it felt like until then.

That night, I felt lost and confused. I realized I would never be writing "Dear Gumby and Bobby" on my letters again. I would never receive birthday cards that said, "Love Gumby and Bobby.". I would never get to see him in person and be old enough that I would be able to remember what he was like.

Then I realized that I never really knew my grandpa. The last time I saw him I was maybe four or five. It was after a family reunion at my Uncle Larry's house. At the reunion I fell off of a ladder and broke both of my arms. Even though I was in that condition, I still had fun with my grandparents.

All I ever really knew about him was that he was my dad's stepfather. To me he wasn't my step grandpa; he was my grandpa. I knew that Bobby had altimeters disease. I remember getting a newsletter from my aunt about how my grandma had to be LeeBob, because he couldn't remember much. When I read about that my stomach felt like it does when you go down a roller coaster, it felt like my stomach dropped out of me. I also found out later that he had cancer.

I guess you can say that I was closer to my grandparents than my dad was. Like I said before it is because he is my dad's stepfather. He said that to him Bobby was just someone who made my grandma happy. I think my dad said that because my grandma got remarried to Bobby when my dad was older, so they weren't really close. My dad is the kind of person who goes with the flow of things. He is very laid back about everything.

The night Larry called was my dad's birthday, so I thought he was calling to wish my dad a happy birthday.

I tried to call my dad all night. It felt like I just kept hitting redial every second. I brought my phone everywhere with me so I could answer it quick. I even fell asleep with it in my bed. All I wanted to do was ask about what happened. I wanted to see how he felt, and see if we felt the same way. I felt like he could answer my unanswered questions.

The day after I had found out about his death I was at my friend's house, and my mom said I had to call my dad to see if we were going to the funeral if I wanted to stay. I felt really weird because I didn't want her to hear me. Maybe if I were at my own house I probably would have argued with my dad about going to the funeral.

He said he wasn't home because they went to Sandy Point for his birthday. I asked if he talked to Larry. He said that he was talking to all of our relatives that night. I wanted to know why he called people who lived thousands of miles away, and he didn't even call his own daughter. I was too chicken to ask so I didn't. Then I asked the big question, "Are we going to the funeral?"

I was told that we weren't going. I was heartbroken. I wanted to scream my head off and cry my heart out at the same time.

I didn't understand why we weren't going. He said it was because it was so sudden, and that he didn't want us to finally see everyone in such a sad surrounding.

It was the first death in my family and I didn't even to get to go to the funeral. I was mad at my dad because we couldn't go. I had never been to a funeral before, and I had questions that I wanted answered. How did he die, I wanted my grandma to tell me what he was like, I just wanted to be there. If I would have gone, I wouldn't feel so sad because I just wanted to be there with all my family and talk about it with them. To me death is so final, and I really didn't understand anything about it. I have all these unexplainable emotions that I felt could have been answered at the funeral. I felt that if I went everything would go back to normal.

I still wish I could've gone but my dad and grandpa weren't close so it wasn't as big of a deal to him as it was to me. Maybe I should talk to my dad about how I feel. I might feel better. He might feel better, too.

The Indian Air Accident

I often get a pain in my lower rib section, and it brings back a fun but terrifying story. It all started the horribly boring summer of 2000, or sixth grade. It was something I would have least expected to happen to me. It all started with a simple phone call from my friend Kevin.

"Hello," I said. "Hi, its Kevin and I just finished our jump, hurry up and get back here would ya," he said excitedly. "Alright, alright I'm commin," I responded. "How are you calling anyway?" I asked. "I'm using my dads new cell phone," he said. Then he turned off the phone. "I'm going biking mom, be back for dinner," I said in a hurry. "Ok, just be careful," she said in that you go have fun I have laundry to do kind of voice. "Ha ha, I will," I said, thinking I would be fine. I Quick went in the garage to get my bike, and then headed straight to the jump.

It took only about ten minutes to get there, going as fast as I could. I got there and almost dropped dead. "How long you been here?" I asked. "Only about an hour, ya like it?" he asked. "YEAH! It is perfect, you should have gotten me," I said. "I did, your mom said you were out shopping," he laughed. "Shopping, for what?" "I was at a movie," I said. "Oh, ok, will ya just hit the jump already?" He asked. "shure? You finished it," I asked. "YEAH! Get goin," he said. "Ok, ok," I said.

There was a large hill in front of the jump, so you could gain enough speed to clear the gap. It was hard to get you and the bike up to the top, you couldn't ride up, it was way too steep. I was finally to the top, and ready to go. "be careful, ya don't have gear," he said. "Don't wory, il be fine," I said. My personality said you have done this ten thousand times before, you wont bif it now. But my common sense said you could get hurt bad, really bad.

"Wish me luck, but I don't need it," I said quickly. And immediately after that I started down the hill. I didn't do a trick that time, I just tried to go over and clear the jump. I landed and rode off with no trouble. Kevin ewnt and did the same thing. "It's time for some tricks." I said. He nodded in response. I went and did a bar-spin, one of the easier tricks. Kevin did a no-footer. "Ha, I beat ya," he said referring to Matt Hoffman a playstation game. "Now we go big," I said. "Be careful ya don't have a helmet," he said. "Either do you," I said quickly.

It seemed like a few thousand times heavier on the way up that time. After what seemed like an hour I was finally to the top. I started down and then it all went bad. I leaned forward over my handlebars, to keep from falling backwards. I got off the jump ok and kicked my legs out just as easily, but then the easiness stopped. The landing ramp of the jump looked at me with a smirk as to say, "ha ha sucker." I got back onto the bike but it was leaned way to far forward. It was to late to bail and I was going to do a nosedive. I stood up and leaned back but the only thing it did was make the landing worse. I came down to a rock hard pile of dirt. My handle bar spun around and went right into my ribs. It felt like a semi or two were on me. Kevin raced down to me and there was a dead silence. Nothing was said for about a half an hour. Kevin helped me up and walked me to my house. Then we got home and there was mom to greet us.

"God dangit Tim, didn't I tell you not to get hurt?" she asked. " Common lets go to the hospital, Kevin you want to come?" she asked. "Yeah I can help," he said. I stared out of our van window knowing this summer couldn't possibly get worse. I just hoped my injury wasn't too bad.

I was rushed into an emergency room. I was taken to a x-ray room so they could see what was wrong. They asked my mom a lot of questions about how it happened, but Kevin answered them. "So, Tim what would you like to do?" the doctor asked. "What are the choices?" I questioned. "You can either have surgery and take the chance that we don't get it back together properly and do this all over again, or I can give you a cast and you take it easy for about 4 months, really easy," he said. "I really don't like surgery, but 4 months, why so long?" I asked. "So if there is a section we cant see on the x-ray it will be shure to have healed," he said. "But," I tried but then was rudely interrupted by my mom. "But nothin, I told you to wear pads," she said. "Pads make it hard to move and make you fall," I said. "So, you do anyway," he said. "So what will it be?" the doc asked.

"Give me the cast, I don't want to do this all over again," I said. "Great choice, there goes your summer," my mom said. I just wanted to slap her, and if the doc wasn't there I would have. It took him like a hour to form the cast and place the velcro so I could take it off in showers. And then we went home. " So did you learn your lesson?" my mom asked. "Yeah, be safe when you don't have on pads," I said. Here I am today, in a cast because of a biking accident again, so just what exactly did I think I learned?

Corruptive Cousins

It was a cloudy Sunday morning and rain was promised for the day, just like every morning of the Indy 500. We were all getting ready to go into the track to see the greatest spectacle in racing. It's about a mile walk in to the track from where we parked. I told my uncle that it could take me six minutes and twenty-nine seconds to get to the track. He laughed at my joke. That joke goes back to track because of a little bet I made with my uncle or should I say my track coach. The bet was if I got under six thirty or under for my mile time by Big Nine I could go to the Indy 500 with him and my cousins. That's how my adventure began for me.

There are always thing to see and do well you are walking in. One thing you will always see is people selling tickets for a huge price but they always end up cheating a bunch of people into by them. It also shows how much people really love racing. Along this same stretch there are hundreds upon hundreds of people walking. If you were to stop in the herd of people you would be trampled and would be lost from your pack.

Once we got into there track we did a little shopping for souvenirs for our family members who didn't come. I also had to buy shirts for my other coach. We had to go to three booths to find matching shirts for to give to her brother and his daughter.

After finishing our shopping and getting programs, we finally went to our seats. Since I had never sat with my uncle I had no clue if his seats were good or not. I turned out that they were really good seats. The seats were up high enough so you could see the straight-away and right in front of a big jumbo tron. After eating our lunch my uncle told us, "That he and Lisa were going go walk around for a little bit."

My cousins and I replied, "OK"

Once my uncle aunt left my cousins were talking about going to walk around. I told myself, "all right Meaghan you are going to be seating here all be yourself for the next hour by..."

Then Tyler asked, "Hey, Meag. Would you like to go and walk around with us?"

I replied dumbly, "I would love to go and walk around with you guys. Thanks for asking me!"

My cousin told me that we were going to go to the infield and look around. I had already be to the infield so I thought I would be showing them around but how wrong was I.

After we made a pit stop of our own I saw my oldest cousin Travis walking it to the stadium then Tyler following suit. Then they were both waving to me to follow them in to the stadium. I didn't think it was a good idea because there was guard at the entrance making sure only the people who were **supposed** to go in there did. Not listening to myself I followed them in.

We started to walk when until we found ourselves by the racer's pits. That's when my cousins revealed to me what they wanted to see. They told me that we were going to see Al Unser Jr. pit. My cousins are huge "Little Al" fans and till this day I have no clue why. Following that they told me that they would take me to see Sarah Fisher's pit because they knew how much I liked her.

There was only one thing standing in the way of me and that pit and that was a fence. My cousins being the people whom they wouldn't let them stop them. Travis went first so he could "catch me", then I went so Tyler could help me get over the fence. It was a good thing that he did let me go over before him because I did need help. When all of us got over the fence I told them, "They must not hire by brains."

Right over the fence was Sarah Fisher's pit. It had the smell of gasoline and had tires stacked up like mini pillars. Her pit was blue and white since that the color of her car. There was a lot of computer all having a key purpose to winning the race. We stood there for a couple of minutes and moved on.

When we reached the end we found ourselves by the winner's circle and an opening to get on to pit road. My cousins jumped at the opportunity to go and see all of the cars and drivers. I told them to go without me and that I would wait for them to come back. Pretty soon all of these celebrities started to come through the gate I was standing at. I got to see racers ranging from Heilo Castroneves and Gil de Ferran and celebrities from Steven Tyler and Tim Allen. The best person I saw was Sarah Fisher. I was so excited I got to see my favorite race car driver!

The race was supposed to be starting pretty soon and there was no sign of them anywhere so I freaked like I normally do and ran all the way back to my seat. It must have been almost two miles. I arrived just in time to here Steven Tyler obliterate the National Anthem. After he was done singing Travis and Tyler came running up to the seats and they were all red in the face. We compared stories the best one they had was they got to see Al Unser Jr put his helmet on and get into his car. I came right back with all the people I got to see. I think I won that contest.

We all settled down and watch the best Indy 500 I had seen. Heilo Castroneves won the Indy 500 and his team mate came in second. Overall the racer that got in the top 10 were all racer I liked except for Sarah Fisher who crashed on lap 15.

From this experince I have learned to not worry so much about things because I could miss some of the best things in life if I do.

The Storm

They hit from the back, left and right and all started rolling together in the same direction. It look like a giant fast ball, in a Dodgers game, flying towards you at 100 million mph............

"We're here! We're here! Hurry!" I yelled.

We got to our cabin in the early morning just like my father predicted.

"OK everyone, unpack and then we can eat." My dad said.

"But dad, I'm hungry," my little brother said

"Too bad!"

Everyone unpacked while my dad and I went to put the boat in the water. My aunt met up with us. She rode over in her pontoon. After we got done putting the boat in the water, we went to go see what the family was going to do. We decided to go for a boat ride, and that is when it all started...........

The water was calm; it wasn't white tipped or choppy at all. It was sunny out except for a few dark places. Everyone was talking, and I wasn't really paying a whole lot attention. I was off in my own little world. When I glanced up and saw the most horrible storm I have ever seen!

"Awwwwwwwwww! The clouds!" I shouted. Everyone looked up

"Oh no!" My mom said, " Nick, give me that life jacket!"

"OK, OK mom just chill."

Needless to say, my mom can't swim. She can't even float. If she can't touch the bottom, she freaks. My aunt threw the throttle forward and the waves got higher and higher. The water was so high and so choppy that the waves started coming over the front of the boat. It was completely dark out, and it was raining very hard.

BOOM! BANG! Thunder cracked, and everyone was scared.

We made a plan that as soon as we got to the dock the guys would get out and try to tie the boat to the dock and the children and the ladies would grab as much stuff as they could, and go to the cabin.

We got 30 ft from the dock. The waves were so bad that we couldn't travel really fast. We pulled into the docking stall, and right when we got close enough, a huge wave slammed us into the dock. We put a hole in their new dock. We tried to swing the boat to the side so we could tie it up, but my strength, my dads, and Dwight's strength were no match for the storm's.

"Everyone get off!" My dad frantically said.

Meanwhile, the boat would not stop moving. It kept moving from side to side.

"Julie, when everyone gets off put the boat into reverse. We're going to have to beach it. Everyone get ready"

Everyone got off and they ran towards the cabin. My dad and I stayed to help the other people who were coming. The rain fell even harder and harder, and it felt like ice. The other boat came in, and we managed to get that boat tied off. Everyone booked it towards their cabins, and I was about to go too; when I saw a couple of guys struggling to get their boat turned around. The water had almost totally swamped their boat. I ran over to help one of the guys. As soon as I got close the boat hinge broke off. My dad bolted over to help us, and a few more guys came. We got the boat tied down and we were about to run to our cabin when I remembered our boat was still out there.

"Dad!"

"What?!"

"Our boat!!"

"OH ****!" My dad said.

We ran to our boat and the water was filling up the boat

"Nick, grab the rope. When I untie the boat, pull it to shore."

"OK dad."

He untied it and it stood on end. It was straight up at down. I had to pull really hard to get it to come down.

When I got it ashore I pulled it all the way out of the water. I tied the bow line to a tree. That knot was the worst knot I have ever made in my life, But it held so I left it alone. My dad grabbed everything that he could, and I grabbed the trolling motor battery. We got back soaked from head to toe, and the storm moved away as fast as it came.........

That storm ended up creating 3 tornadoes and those tornadoes killed 7 people and caused one million dollars worth of damage. There are many things that I've learned from this situation. It was an experience I will never forget, but the only thing that I can think of right now is that when a dangerous situation came, my family and people I had no clue who they were, came together for one purpose. To get everyone back safely, and we succeeded.

Crash

I woke up at 6:30 a.m. Waking up early was a regular thing for me in the summer. My mom had to go to work early that day. She told me that it was turning out to be a really nice day. So, I could bike up to daycare. It was about an hour later before I ever got myself ready for the day. I was biking up the hill, and it started raining. I started going as fast as I could, but I got drenched.

It rained for about two hours; it finally stopped the down pouring. I headed outside from daycare. It looked like it still might rain, but I went out without caring or without anything to do. We, a friend and I, built a jump, because there wasn't anything to do. So, I started to build a bike jump at the end of the curb to gain more air when you went. I had been working on it a while to make sure the jump would stay up.

We worked on it for about 45 minutes. My friend had been going off it for quite a while. I decided to start going off it too. Finally, I got a good enough feel for the jump to try a bar spin.

I headed up the hill nearby. Once at the top, I started down. I was like a train going full speed. I hit the jump and went flying. When I was just about off the end of the jump, my tire on my bike slipped right off the jump. I hit the ground arms first. Then, at the speed I was going, I just slid right across the road seeing that it was still wet from the rain.

I hit the other curb not knowing what had just happened. I got up, brushed myself off, and while doing that, my friend came over and said, "Man, that was awesome!"

I replied, telling him, "That really hurt." As I was dusting myself off, I felt this big hole in my arm, and it was bleeding.

I ran as fast as I could to the house, with the blood oozing out of my arm like a river. I got to the sink and tried to wash it out, but it never ever stopped bleeding. My daycare provider finally got back from the walk they had gone on. We slowed the bleeding down to get a bandage on it. The next decision was whether I needed to go get stitches put in. We decided not to because the bleeding had stopped.

The day finally passed. My dad had come to pick my up, and I told him what I had done. He called me a very big idiot for doing what I did. I told him it was a pretty good crash, but he ignored me. My dad was taking me home by this time.

Finally, the moral of this story is don't do anything on your bike right after it gets done raining.

Three Hours of Torture

Sitting there, eyes stinging with sweat. Every muscle in my body wanted to quit on me. My knuckles, bleeding from the repetitive punches. I searched the crowd for one face. No, he wasn't there. I guess he was too sick to stay. I wanted to blink away the sweat rolling down into my eyes, but I was afraid that if I closed them, I would never be able to open them again. Who would have known that in three simple hours, my life would completely change…

"…This cold front will carry snow across the Twin Cities region…" Oh great, no matter where we go, there will always be Paul Douglas.

I wrestled my way out of the sheets strangling grips and fell onto the hotel floor. My sister was still drooling on the starch white pillow. Just for the fun of it, I grabbed my pillow and smothered her tiny head.

"One Lizi sandwich, table seven," I joked to no one in particular. I realized that I must be pretty nervous if I was making stupid jokes and talking to myself. As I glanced over at the clock, I panicked. I promised that I would wake up early to read my book.

I jumped off the bed as if the sheets had turned into lava. Tripping over the bags of clothes that seemed to spill their guts all over the floor overnight. As I was digging through the endless pile of shirts, pants, and dirty socks, a little memo popped into my head. It was reminding me what today was (like I needed any more reminders). An instant wave of dread seemed to wash over me taking the smile right off my face.

As I got dressed, the fear of the events taking place later that morning seemed to grab my clothes and use them to choke the life out of me.

My family was *ultra* nice to me. My sister, who is now eleven, didn't ask all the usual stupid questions. (By the way, do **you** feel as if you're being watched?) My brother, fifteen now, actually left me alone. My dear old dad didn't even jump me. My mother, who's age will not be disclosed, was very quiet. She seemed as nervous as me.

The rest of the morning seemed to fly by. I don't remember much of it except for the fact that every minute that passed seemed to tighten the knot in my stomach.

Somehow I lived to see 10:45. The knot in my stomach was killing me. I was slowly going insane. As we searched the crowd for my aunt, uncle, and grandpa, we had to surge our way through the sea of bodies. The noise was deafening! I couldn't hear myself think.

After millions of "Excuses me," and lots of shoving, we found them. My grandpa, weak with cancer, was really proud of me. My aunt, struggling with M.S., gave me the biggest hug in the world. My uncle, the biggest teddy bear in the whole world, was beaming from ear to ear. Then with everyone together, we headed to the hotel's ballroom.

When the karate instructors got everyone settled, they lined us up to start our three hours of torture.

"Katie Shea from the National Karate Schools of Rochester." I ran up to the table at the front of the room, bowed, and moved off to the side. Punches blurred into punches, kick after kick. My muscles were screaming. Every breath hurt. I couldn't get enough air. If this kept up, I would pass out. Now I don't want to bore you describing every single minute of the three hours. If you want to know the details, come and talk to me.

Anyway, after three hours of hearing "Kick, kick, kick!" I was ready to rip the speakers off the wall.

…Sitting there in the back of the room, I saw people receiving the ultimate prize, their black belt. As name after name was called off, I scanned the crowd once again hoping that I was wrong the first few times. My eyes locked with my mom's and she shook her head. No, my grandpa wasn't there. It was a sledgehammer blow, my heart was being ripped from my chest.

"Katie Shea from Rochester." The announcement woke me from my thoughts. My legs were rubber as I went up to the front. My instructor, Mr. Nelson, was there to greet me. As his rough hands whipped my belt around me and gave the final tug, it felt like I was sitting on top of the world.

"Congratulations, good job," as we saluted, my mom started to cry. My parents handed me my bag that held my glowing blue uniform. I then moved down the line shaking hands with the same individuals that had tortured me minutes earlier.

Looking back on that day, December 18, 1999, I am still proud of every minute of that day. I went in feeling confident and came out exhausted.

Once upon a Sunday

It was just a regular Sunday morning. Well, that's what I thought.

I was awaken by the creak of the bathroom door opening and shutting. I struggled to open my eyes as I tried to make out the numbers on my clock.

"It's only 7:15," I mumbled to myself. "I can go back to bed."

"Kelsy! Time to get up!" my dad hollered.

I am usually a morning person except on Sundays.

"Hold on. I just have to check something quick," I moaned quietly.

"Come on! We're going to be late for church!" my mom hollered in her high pitched voice.

I looked at the time.

"Great," I said to myself sarcastically, "it's 8:00. I guess I better get up."

I slowly pushed the covers off and stuck my legs out. As I stumbled out of my bed and out of my room, I felt like I had just arrived home from an all night party.

I took a long, hot shower. When I got out, the bathroom was full of steam and the mirrors were fogged up and a cool breeze gave me a chill.

It only took me about twenty minutes to get ready, which is pretty good for me. My family and I got into our dodge mini van, and drove off to church. I was still half asleep when we arrived, and was thinking about taking a nap.

Church was as boring as usual. The pastor's plain, simple voice echoed in my head as I struggled to keep my eyes open. I stared blankly at the bulletin wishing I was out with my friends talking and laughing. I felt like time was moving in slow motion. Finally, what seemed to be a 6 hour sermon was over. Next was confirmation.

Once upon a Sunday

I don’t wanna go to confirmation. I’m too tired!

“Mom!” I whined. “Do I have to go to confirmation?”

“Of course you do!” she replied. “It’s confirmation!”

“Fine,” I said quietly.

I slowly walked downstairs into the basement of the church. There were people everywhere and it smelled like fresh donuts and hot coffee. I walked into the confirmation room.

“Kelsy!” Suzy yelled. “Come sit by me!”

“Okay,” I replied.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“Nothing, I’m just really tired,” I exclaimed.

“Oh,” She responded.

“Okay everybody. Sit down,” our teacher, Paul, announced. “Who read Chapter this weeks assignment?” he asked.

Everyone looked around at each other and smiled.

“Okay,” he said as he giggled, “I guess we have some reading to do.”

Confirmation was boring, but my friends made it fun. It seemed like it just started when Paul announced that it was time to leave. It helps, I hate to admit, to pass notes with my friends the whole time.

Well, this definitely was a normal Sunday. Hard time getting up, rushing to get ready, falling asleep in the van, taking a nap during the sermon, and goofing off during confirmation.

Once upon a Sunday

The ride home was only ten minutes long, but it seemed like a lifetime. My older brother, Ian, and I started quarreling like two dogs over a bone.

"Don't hit me!" I yelled.

"I didn't!" he screamed back.

Ian gave me "that look". That, "I'm going to bug you and mom won't know", look. "That look" drove me insane and that made us fight even more.

"You two stop it!" my mom hollered.

Ian and I were both startled by the high pitched scream of our mom. We looked at her and then looked at each other. He stuck his tongue out at me so I turned around quickly as my hair hit his face and stuck my nose in the air. From then on, I ignored him and the ride improved.

When we arrived at our house and got out of the car, Ian crept behind me and whispered, "Brat!"

I decided not to start another fight so I ignored him and quickly changed the subject.

"Mom," I asked, "what are we going to eat for lunch?"

"How does hot dogs and fries sound?" she asked.

"Okay, I guess," I replied.

When we got into the house there was a note on the table.

What's this? I thought.

On the kitchen table, there was a blue piece of paper with the following message written on it:

Went down to Pine Island to take Grandpa to the hospital. He is coughing up blood etc.

Once upon a Sunday

Rick

My grandpa was a smoker for over fifty years and suffered from emphysema. This wasn't the first time that my grandpa coughed up blood, so my brothers and I thought nothing of it. Mom looked concerned. She said," Let's eat quick. We're going to go see grandpa."

It took about fifteen minutes for my mom to cook lunch. She wanted us to rush to visit my grandpa. She must have sensed something. We were in such a hurry that we were all running into each other. My mom ran into the kitchen and turned off the oven as the buzzer went off.

"Lunch

!" she yelled.

One by one, we raced into the kitchen. The smell of fresh hot dogs and fries filled the air. We quickly placed the steaming food on our little plastic ivy plates and ran out the door. Mom told us to bring it with us into the van.

"Okay kids," my mom said as she started the van. "Your grandpa is really sick and might..." she paused, "die." Her voice got choked up.

The three of us kids looked at each other in disbelief. We didn't even think of fighting and it wasn't the time. It was a quiet ride to the hospital.

When we arrived at the hospital, my dad was waiting for us. He could showed us where we had to go to.

The hospital smelled horrible, almost as if the building had been deserted for years. We walked by many rooms, some empty, some occupied. It made me worry to see all of the sick people lying in white hospital beds.

Once upon a Sunday

We entered a small room full of chairs, couches, tables. There were many people in the room. Some people I knew, and some people I had never seen before in my life. I looked around and saw faces. Not worried faces, but sad faces.

Why is everybody sad? Grandpa must be really sick.

Then something shocked me. I saw my Grandma. Her face was pale and her eyes were red and swollen. Could this be? My grandma, the one who had always been strong and stern, was crying.

This must be serious. I thought to myself. *Grandma Olsen never cries.*

I reached out and gave my Grandma a hug.

"What's the matter?" I whispered to my dad. "Why is everybody so sad? Is grandpa really sick?"

"Kelsy..." he replied, "Grandpa isn't just sick."

"What do you mean?" I asked, now more concerned.

"Grandpa died," he responded.

I didn't say anything. I just stared.

"He was already gone when I got to Grandma's house," he interrupted the silence.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was just two days ago I was laughing and having a good time with him.

My grandparents had taken us to Shakeys the previous Friday with the gift certificate we had given them for Christmas. I didn't really care for Shakeys, but I ate some pizza just to make them happy. I tried hard to relive that night to fight back these horrible moments.

Once upon a Sunday

"Do you kids want to play in the game room?" my grandpa asked.

"Sure!" the three of us replied quickly.

"Okay here's some money, go get some tokens," my grandpa said with a big grin on his face.

After about an hour of playful fun, we left Shakeys and head for our house. We played 500, my grandparent's favorite card game. I was my grandma's partner and Dain, my brother, was on my grandpa's team. Grandma and I won the first game, Dain and my grandpa won the second game. We all laughed as we laid our cards down. Before long, it was time for them to go home.

Grandpa always worried about it being too dark when they traveled, so they left at a decent time. I hugged my grandma good-bye and said I love you and thanked her for the money and supper. I was standing on one of our living room chairs as I hugged grandpa good-bye. I remember the exact thing I said.

"Bye Grandpa!"

"Bye!" he replied with a grin.

"Thanks for the supper and money!"

"Your welcome."

"I love you!"

"Me too!"

We both giggled. That was our little joke. Every time I told my grandpa I loved him, he would say, "Me too!", as if he loved himself too. I don't know why we thought this was so funny, but I will never forget those parting words. Very important words to me, the last words I ever heard him say. the memory faded away.

I tried to hold back the tears in the hospital room. All of the people in the room were staring at me and my brothers. I couldn't hold them back anymore. Tears flowed down my

Once upon a Sunday

cheeks as a part of my heart disappeared. I buried my face into my mom's shoulder and sobbed. Deep in my heart I fought it.

This isn't true! I thought to myself. *Grandpa isn't dead! I just saw him on Friday.* The more I thought about it, the more I cried. Then the pastor came up to me and told me that everything would be all right because God was with me. That didn't help. No matter what anybody told me or did, that wouldn't bring my Grandpa back.

At my grandpa's early morning funeral, the sound of trumpets and empty casings being shot echoed in my ears as I thought of all of the times I had spent with my grandpa. At his house, he sat in his chair and watched 'Wheel of Fortune' as he held my feet up so I could do a hand stand. He was there on my birthdays, on Christmas, on Halloween. He took me for a ride on his tractor and taught me how to ride a go-cart. He showed me how to make the best of things and too have some fun even when your down. He was always there for me.

I look back and wish that I would have appreciated him more. Appreciated his presence, his company, and his life. I never imagined that that Friday at Shakeys would be the last time I would ever see him again. I never imagined that those words would be the last things I ever shared with him.

Even though my grandpa is gone from this life forever, I hope I will always remember to be thankful for the special people in my life.

Personal Narrative

Fibula Breakage

Run. Jump. Cleared. Land. Twist. CRACK!!!! This is how it happened. It was a bright and sunny day with occasional big, fluffy white clouds. I was at school. It was gym class, and we were in our track and field unit. My class had two teachers because every other day we had heath. One of my teachers wasn't trained to be a heath teacher. Anyway, we got to the field, and my teachers told us to practice our events for the competition in a few weeks. We had signed up for our events a few days earlier. One of my events was the hurdle.

I went over to where they were set up and got in line. I waited for a few minutes, and then it was my turn. I was about five and a half yards away from the first hurdle. I started running like there was a madman chasing me with a live chainsaw. By this time, I was getting close. I jumped and made it over. I landed on my feet and then twisted my left leg. I heard a popping/cracking noise. I fell over and immediately started to feel pain on my lower leg. It felt like a pro-wrestler was taking a hammer and beating my leg with it. I sat up, and people were yelling at me to get out of the way. I began to hobble to my teachers. Doing only this caused a great amount of energy and pain for me.

When I got there, one of my teachers asked, "Ashley, are you ok?"

"I don't know. My leg really hurts," I replied.

"You'll be fine," said my other teacher.

"Why don't you sit down for a while," said my first teacher.

I sat there for the rest of the hour. Because I couldn't walk well, two of the girls in me gym class helped me try to get back to the locker room. We were about halfway there when my teachers said to go to the nurse's office. We had to turn around to get to the closest door. When we finally got there, they set me in a chair. I thanked them, and they left. The nurse was very nice, and she examined my leg. She didn't think it was broken, but she called my mom and dad and told them that it would be best if I got it x-rayed. My mom and step-dad came and got me. My step-dad had to carry me to the car. I got home, and my mom made an appointment to see the doctor. We had to wait for two hours. My mom had to work, and my step-dad didn't have his drivers' license yet. My dad came and got me. He had to carry me the whole way. We went in and got my leg x-rayed. They said that I had broken my Fibula, the smaller bone in your lower leg that supports your Tibia. They then gave me a white walking cast. After it was dry, my dad signed it. He was the first to do so. In big, bold letters with two different colored markers, he wrote on my foot:

Epilogue: To this day, I still have that old cast that I got in 6th grade. Also, my leg is better, even though it still hurts. It hurts when the atmosphere becomes unstable or when the barometric pressure becomes higher than normal. The last thing that will make it hurt is if I twist my leg the same way that I did when I broke it. I am very afraid of hurdles, and I have not jumped hurdles to this day.

THE EFFECTS OF THE READ NATURALLY PROGRAM ON MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' ORAL READING FLUENCY AND READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN A RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT SETTING

by

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B.A., Moorhead State University, 1995

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Winona State
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The Effects of the Read Naturally Program on Middle School Students' Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension Skills in a Residential Treatment Setting

Capstone directed by Margaret Lundquist

Abstract

One of Campus School's goals is that all students will meet or exceed high academic standards and they will be able to earn a diploma or GED. This project was completed to address poor student reading comprehension skills as indicated by intake screening scores using the Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORC-3).

As part of a Title I Delinquent and Neglected Youth grant, Campus School was able to purchase the Read Naturally reading program to address poor student reading skills. This program utilizes repeated reading and modeling strategies for improved reading comprehension.

Four middle school students were selected based on their TORC-3 reading comprehension quotient scores. Students met individually with a teacher bi-weekly for 25 minutes each session. After an appropriate reading level was determined, students performed an initial oral reading fluency on a reading passage, recorded their score on a graph, listened to an audiotape version of the same passage three times, completed comprehension questions, and then performed a final oral reading fluency and recorded their score on their graph.

Using the TORC-3 as a post-test, results indicate a general improvement in students reading comprehension quotients. Based on these results, Campus School will continue to use this reading program as a tool to improve students' reading skills.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Campus School is a Rochester Public Schools Care and Treatment program working collaboratively with the Many Rivers Juvenile Center and Von Wald Youth Shelter. This program serves students in four different programs including residential treatment (RTC), juvenile detention (JDC), juvenile holdover (JHC), and the Von Wald Youth Shelter (VW).

The residential treatment center includes three different units. Students can be placed voluntarily by parents or by court or social services. The length of stay varies by unit ranging from 30 days up to two years. Students in the residential treatment program are all boys ranging in age from 10 to 18 years. The total number of potential residential treatment students is 24; currently we are serving 21 students.

The juvenile detention and juvenile holdover are locked facilities where students are placed by court services as part of a consequence type program or while awaiting court. Both facilities hold up to 25 students (either males or females), 17 at JDC and 8 at JHC. The length of stay varies between the two facilities. Students at JHC can only stay for up to 8 days while JDC students can be there for longer periods of time. Generally, there is great student turnover in both programs.

Finally, the Von Wald Youth Shelter is a Sheriff's Youth Ranch program where students are generally placed by social services. It functions like a group home for students waiting foster placement or other treatment program placements. This facility can hold 10 students (either males or females) and the length of stay varies depending upon each student's circumstances.

The students at Campus School have often been in several different placements over an extended period of time and have not found much success in the regular school setting. It is the mission at Campus School to provide a learning environment where students feel safe and welcome in order to build up their academic and social skills to a level so that when they leave the program, they will be able to make a smooth transition back to their home schools. Unfortunately, many of the same students filter through one or more of the four programs throughout any given year.

Need for the Study

As part of a Title I grant, Campus School purchased the reading program Read Naturally to help improve students' reading skills. The Read Naturally strategy combines teacher modeling, repeated reading, and progress monitoring to improve reading fluency and comprehension skills. It uses high-interest passages ranging from the .08 to 7.0 reading levels. Therefore, this project has served a real building need by collecting data to determine the effectiveness of the Read Naturally strategy to improve students' reading skills.

Statement of the Problem

As students enter Campus School, they are given the Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORC-3) as a screening tool to determine their current reading skills. Intake screening data collected in September 2001 suggested that 31% of students tested had reading comprehension quotient (RCQ) scores below 90, or below average, which may indicate a presence of a reading skill deficit. The average range of RCQ scores on the TORC-3 is between 90 and 110.

One of the goals at Campus School is that students will meet or exceed high academic standards and all students who enter high school will successfully earn a diploma or GED. Campus School has a strong commitment to helping students improve their reading skills in order to earn a diploma or GED.

Statement of the Question

Does the reading program Read Naturally increase students' oral reading fluency and reading comprehension skills in a residential treatment setting?

Definition of Terms

- **Reading Comprehension Quotient**: a general index of the student's overall reading comprehension abilities.
- **Reading Fluency**: the index of the degree to which a reader's oral reading resembles everyday spoken language.
- **Reading Comprehension**: to read for meaning.
- **Independent Reading Level**: reading material students can handle on their own.
- **Instructional Reading Level**: the most difficult reading material that a student can handle given assistance from a teacher.
- **Reading Prompt**: a short passage that is at a student's instructional level used to measure reading fluency and comprehension.
- **Repeated Reading**: reading a prompt a number of times to increase reading fluency and comprehension.
- **Reading Errors**: errors are marked if a student substitutes, repeats, inserts, omits, or self-corrects a word while reading aloud.

- **Cold Timing**: the first oral reading timing on new material as part of the repeated reading process.
- **Final Timing**: after practicing a reading prompt several times, a final oral reading timing is taken as the last part of the repeated reading process.
- **Words Read Correct per Minute (WCPM)**: the number of words read aloud per minute with the errors subtracted.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was the small sample of students that was used for this project. A second limitation was that this project was done in a one-to-one setting. Both of these limitations may have impacted the extent to which the results can be generalized to the larger classroom setting. A third limitation was the amount of time each student spent on reading instruction. The time each student met with the teacher working specifically on reading skills was 25 minutes two times a week. Depending upon the needs of each student, this may not have been enough time to show adequate progress toward their goals. In addition, scheduled and unscheduled events also affected the amount of time students spent on reading instruction. None of the students were able to meet during every scheduled reading session due to several reasons such as individual therapy sessions, court appointments, and school holiday breaks.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Education Goal Panel (1995) reported that only 25% of students in Grade 4, 28% of students in Grade 8, and 34% of students in Grade 12 achieve proficient reading standards. Given that many students with reading difficulties drop out of school prior to reaching Grade 12, the low reading performance of 12th graders is especially disappointing. Because instruction after elementary school primarily focuses on subject content rather than on teaching basic skills, the needs of adolescents with reading problems are frequently overlooked (Mercer, Campbell, Miller, Mercer, & Lane, 2000). In addition, the personal and societal costs of reading problems are substantial. Illiteracy has been positively correlated with unemployment, low wages, poverty, crime, and low self-esteem (Brunner, 1993).

Improving Reading Fluency

The development of reading fluency in students is considered an important goal of reading instruction. This goal, however, has been neither actively pursued nor fully realized in many reading curriculums (Allington, 1983; Anderson, 1981).

Within the past twenty years, instructional methodologies have been developed that are aimed at achieving reading fluency in deficient readers. One of the most promising of these methodologies is the method of repeated readings (Dowhower, 1989; Samuels, 1997). In this approach, readers practice reading one text until some predetermined level of fluency is achieved. Samuels (1997) explained that this method helps students develop word recognition skills to a point of automaticity, a necessary level of processing for fluent reading. Schreiber (1980) noted that repeated readings help students to develop proficiency in reading in syntactically (meaningful) appropriate phrases, also a necessary element in fluent reading. The observation that gains in fluency made through repeated readings of one text are transferred to new, previously unread texts is critical to the method of repeated readings (Rasinski, 1990).

Because demonstration or modeling is often the most efficient and least intrusive procedure for getting accurate responses from students, it is the most widely used technique for increasing academic performance of learners at the acquisition stage (Hendrickson & Gable, 1981). Therefore, a related technique used to improve reading fluency is the repeated listening-while-reading (LWR) strategy. This method differs from repeated readings in that the reader reads the text while simultaneously listening to a fluent reader read the same text.

Incidental learning research has shown that students can learn to read words accurately by observing others reading accurately (Orelove, 1982). It has been suggested that if students can increase sight word accuracy by observing others reading fluently and accurately, then they also may be able to increase their rate or speed of reading (Heckelman, 1969; Rasinski, 1989). Skinner, Logan, Robinson, and Robinson (1997) performed a review of various demonstration or modeling techniques and found that allowing students to hear another person read aloud while also seeing the words can increase reading accuracy in students with reading skill deficits.

Schreiber (1980) suggested that the inclusion of a fluent oral model in the repeated readings method may prove more effective in promoting fluency than repeated readings alone. Furthermore, the listening-while-reading method may be a more versatile classroom instructional approach because it can be implemented with groups of students, on a one-to-one basis, or with students working independently (Rasinski, 1990).

Raskinski (1990) conducted a study comparing the effectiveness of repeated readings and listening-while-reading methods to improve fluency in third grade students. The major findings of this study were that both methods were effective in improving the reading fluency of third grade students and that neither method was superior to the other in improving students' reading fluency. Raskinski suggests that these results may have positive implications for teachers because they will be provided with alternative methods or combination of methods when teaching students how to improve their fluency rates. Another benefit of using repeated reading and repeated listening-while-reading activities is that they may be appropriate not only for those students experiencing reading difficulties, but also average and above average readers as well.

Rasinski (1990) warns, however, that repeated reading methods used alone may have several practical drawbacks over the long term. He suggests that students may tire from its use and may lose interest in and motivation for the repetition of previously read materials. Moreover, repeated readings may be more labor intensive for teachers as they are called on to provide assistance to individuals who are experiencing difficulty in initial readings. However, several variations of the listening-while-reading activity can help maintain students' interest. The use of tape-recorded readings that students listen to on their own can help to make them more independent and interested in their reading activities. Such listening-while-reading activities can be particularly beneficial for those students characterized as experiencing passive failure in reading (Winograd & Smith, 1987) by helping them to learn to take personal command of their own growth in reading.

Furthermore, listening-while-reading activities affirm the active role of the teacher in instruction and add considerable importance to the notion of modeling fluent reading within the context of reading instruction. Instructional time may also be maximized with the listening-while-reading approach, because students' first reading attempts in a new text in repeated reading are often slow and halting, whereas the versions heard in the listening-while-reading approach are fast paced and fluent (Rasinski, 1990).

Reading fluency and comprehension

LaBerge and Samuel's (1974) model of the role of attention in reading has stimulated a large amount of research, much of it focused on the relationship between reading fluency and comprehension (O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea, 1987). According to this model, when attention is required for accurate decoding, little remains for the purpose of comprehending what is read. As words are mastered and fluency increases, however, decoding becomes an automatic process in the sense that attention is no longer required to accomplish it. When decoding is automatic, more attention may be allocated to comprehension, and it also should improve. In summary, the model implies that improved accuracy and fluency of decoding should result in increased comprehension.

O'Shea, Sindelar, and O'Shea (1985) examined the effects of repeated readings and attentional cues on reading fluency and comprehension. The results of their study indicate that repeated reading facilitates significant comprehension gains. Comprehension scores increased on the average by 7% after three readings and 11% after seven readings.

In addition, O'Shea et. al. (1985) found that repeated readings also increased students' reading fluency rates. The average increase from a single reading to three readings was approximately 24 words per minute, while an increase of 12 words per minute was achieved between three and seven readings. Students initially read at rates that ranged from 70 to 119 words per minute. With repeated readings, their reading rates rapidly surpassed 120 words per minute. According to Starlin and Starlin (1973), improvement in fluency from below 120 words per minute to above 120 words per minute represents a qualitative change from instructional level to independent level.

Overall, the research by O'Shea et. al (1985) suggests that the optimal strategy seems to be to have students practice reading passages at their instructional level about four times while cueing them to read for comprehension. The cue emphasizes the primary goal of reading: communication of thoughts and ideas about the world through written language. Repeated reading provides students with the necessary practice to build fluency, acquire new information, and maintain established information.

Read Naturally Philosophy

The key role of reading fluency in the decoding, comprehension, and motivation of readers has been well documented (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999). Students with poor reading fluency read haltingly, slowly producing a single word at a time, severely limiting their overall understanding of passage meaning. They tend to ignore punctuation so that phrases and sentences become meaningless combinations of words. These students often read without expression, further contributing to confused or limited comprehension (Allington, 1983; Hasbrouck, Ihnot, and Rogers, 1999). Disfluent readers who struggle with reading tasks may consequently lose interest in the many school activities that require reading. They rarely read for pleasure. Often their feelings of self-worth are negatively affected. Because these students engage in less reading than their peers, they continue to fall further behind (Stanovich, 1986).

The Read Naturally strategy was developed to improve reading fluency by combining three empirically-supported techniques: reading from a model (listening-while-reading), repeated readings, and progress monitoring (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999). Progress monitoring involves the student or teacher recording student progress over time. Research suggests that this technique helps to improve student motivation as well as raise their self-esteem (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986).

The Read Naturally strategy has been classroom tested in general education classrooms, remedial reading programs, and special education settings. One of the strengths of the Read Naturally method is that the majority of activities can be successfully self-directed by the students themselves, keeping the teacher's role to a minimum. This makes this strategy especially useful in multi-level achievement settings such as inclusion classrooms and resource rooms.

The present research was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the Read Naturally program in a residential treatment setting. Specifically, the research was aimed at whether the Read Naturally strategy would be an effective tool to improve middle school students' oral reading fluency rates and comprehension scores.

CHAPTER III

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Participants

Participants for this study included four male 8th grade residential treatment students. Each participant was selected for this project based on their Tests of Reading Comprehension Revised (TORC-3) reading comprehension quotient scores (RCQ) from September 2001. The TORC-3 is a standardized test of reading comprehension that can be used as a screening tool to identify reading skill deficits. Campus School uses this test as part of an educational intake screening process as students enter the program. According to the TORC-3 manual, the average range of RCQ scores is between 90 and 110. Any score around 90 or below is considered to be at-risk and reading skill remediation may be necessary. Therefore, each of the four participants chosen for this study had RCQ scores of 92 or below.

Procedures

Each student was scheduled to meet with me in a one-to-one setting two days per week beginning September 2001 and ending in January 2002. Each session lasted approximately 25 minutes in length. At the beginning of each session, the student was given a short reading prompt at their instructional reading level. Their instructional reading levels were determined during the first session by finding the level in which the student could read 80-100 words correct per minute on a cold timing. Individual student goals were set by adding 40 words to the number of words the student read correctly while reading the placement story. These goals were suggested as a guide for teachers in the Read Naturally Teacher's Manual. Normally the goal would fall between 120-155 words per minute for students reading at or above the fifth grade reading level.

Once the appropriate level was determined, a reading passage from the corresponding level was selected. Before beginning to read, the student was reminded to read not only for speed, but also for understanding (attentional cueing). The student then performed a one-minute cold timed reading while I followed along and recorded any errors. At the end of one minute, the student graphed their results with a blue colored pencil.

Next, the student found the audiocassette tape corresponding to the reading prompt and listened to the taped reading prompt three times using headphones to help them focus on the passage (listening-while-reading). Once they listened to the tape, the students answered the comprehension questions that followed. The number of questions varied per reading level. Generally, the lower reading levels had 5 questions and the upper reading levels had 9 questions. The comprehension questions for all reading levels required a combination of multiple-choice, matching, fill in the blank, and/or short answer responses. I corrected the comprehension questions and the student recorded their score on their comprehension graph. Students were only allowed to miss one comprehension question per passage in order to "pass" their comprehension questions.

Before the final timing, the student was given an opportunity to practice reading the prompt (repeated reading). Once they were ready, the student performed the final reading timing. Again, I followed along and recorded any errors. Finally, the student recorded their reading rate on their graph using a red colored pencil (progress monitoring).

A student was able to move on to the next Read Naturally level once they met both their fluency and comprehension goals three days in a row. The expected end result was for the student to increase their reading skills as measured by a post-test using the TORC-3.

Each student was scheduled to meet with me twice a week, however, due to student absences for therapy or other reasons, none of the students were able to meet every session every week. In addition to student absences, there were also school breaks that conflicted with the testing schedule. These missed sessions are not believed to have impacted the results of this study.

Data Collection Tools

Pre-test and post-test data were collected using the Tests of Reading Comprehension Revised (TORC-3). This is a standardized test of reading comprehension that provides the assessor a reading comprehension quotient score (RCQ) to determine a student's reading abilities.

Both the students and myself collected data each session. During each reading passage timing, I recorded the number of words read per minute and subtracted the number of errors to determine the student's word read correct per minute or WCPM. Each student recorded these scores on their fluency graph either in blue colored pencil for the cold timing or in red colored pencil for the hot or final timing. In addition, each student completed comprehension questions at the end of each passage. I corrected the student's answers and the student recorded the results on their comprehension graph.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Process

Data were analyzed by reviewing total gains students made both in their oral reading fluency and reading comprehension scores. Pre-test and post-test reading comprehension quotient scores were recorded and total gains analyzed. In addition, students' oral reading fluency scores were analyzed comparing the baseline or initial "cold" timing score to the final "cold" timing score for one reading level. Total growth scores for each student were calculated and reviewed.

Results

This study addressed the effectiveness of the reading program Read Naturally on students' oral reading fluency and reading comprehension skills in a residential treatment setting. After analyzing pre-test and post-test TORC-3 reading comprehension quotient scores, it appears that all four students were able to increase their RCQ scores by at least 5 points. See Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

Pre-test and Post-test Reading Comprehension Quotient Scores
Using the TORC-3

Student	September 2001 TORC-3 RCQ	January 2002 TORC-3 RCQ	Total Gain
1	92	103	11
2	67	72	5
3	87	92	5
4	78	95	17

Students' oral reading fluency scores also appear to have increased after using Read Naturally between September 2001 and January 2002. See Table 2 below. This table compares the students' cold timings from when they started instruction in Read Naturally to the last day they received instruction. The cold timings are compared because they are considered to be the student's true reading rate since they are reading the passage for the first time without practice. Based on previous research using the Read Naturally program, it was expected that students' oral reading fluency rates would increase with each new passage (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, and Rogers, 1999). The current data reflects this trend.

After analyzing the data further, it appears that there was no regression between each reading level for three of the four participants. Student 4 met his fluency and comprehension goals, but was discharged before moving on to the next level. It may be concluded that these students had learned some new reading skills during the time Read Naturally was implemented.

TABLE 2

Oral Reading Fluency Scores (Words Read Correct Per Minute) and Gains Made Using Read Naturally

Student	Reading Level Assessed	Baseline WCPM (cold timing)	Final WCPM (cold timing)	Total Gain WCPM	Average Gain per Story WCPM
1	5.6 (14 stories)	105	125	20	1.43
1	5.8/6.0 (3 stories)	117	139	22	7.33
2	5.0 (18 stories)	90	116	26	1.44
2	5.6 (7 stories)	99	122	23	3.29
3	5.6 (12 stories)	151	177	26	2.17
3	5.8/6.0 (3 stories)	200	213	13	4.33
4	5.6 (14 stories)	172	202	30	2.14

Both group and individual student oral reading fluency scores and comprehension scores can be found in Appendices A - M. Based on individual results, all four students made gains in oral reading fluency. Comprehension scores also seem to correspond with the improved fluency rates. As the student's reading rate increased, so too did their comprehension scores. During each session, students were reminded to not only read for speed, but also for understanding. This attentional cue may have also helped to improve their comprehension scores.

Since there was such a small sample size, it cannot be determined whether these results are statistically significant or not. However, for the purposes of this study, the initial results are positive enough to indicate that Read Naturally is a suitable reading program that can be utilized for reading skill improvement at Campus School.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Action Plan

Based on the results from this study, it may be concluded that the Read Naturally strategy did impact the oral reading fluency and reading comprehension skills for these four residential treatment students. However, since the results were based on a small sample size, it is not possible to determine the statistical significance Read Naturally would have on the reading skills of a larger population of students.

After completing a literature review regarding successful reading instruction methods, Read Naturally employs several proven methods of good reading instruction such as repeated reading, modeling, and progress monitoring. Even though there is no one method for teaching reading that works for every child, the results from this study help support that Read Naturally is a viable reading program for helping students improve their oral reading fluency and comprehension skills.

This program was easy to implement in a one-to-one setting. It may be more difficult to use in a traditional classroom setting. However, if used in a resource room, it is plausible to have several reading stations set up around the classroom where students could go and complete a reading passage independently after a teacher or paraprofessional has timed them.

Read Naturally only has passages up to level 7.0. Being a teacher of middle school and high school students, it would be helpful to have higher reading levels because students need to continue to improve their oral reading fluency and reading comprehension as they prepare for college or technical careers.

The students that participated in this study all stated that they enjoyed the stories because they were interesting to them. All of the students also stated that they liked graphing their own results because they could see if they were improving or not. Student motivation was not measured in this study, but it may be a next step in determining the effectiveness of this program for middle school students and potentially high school students at Campus School.

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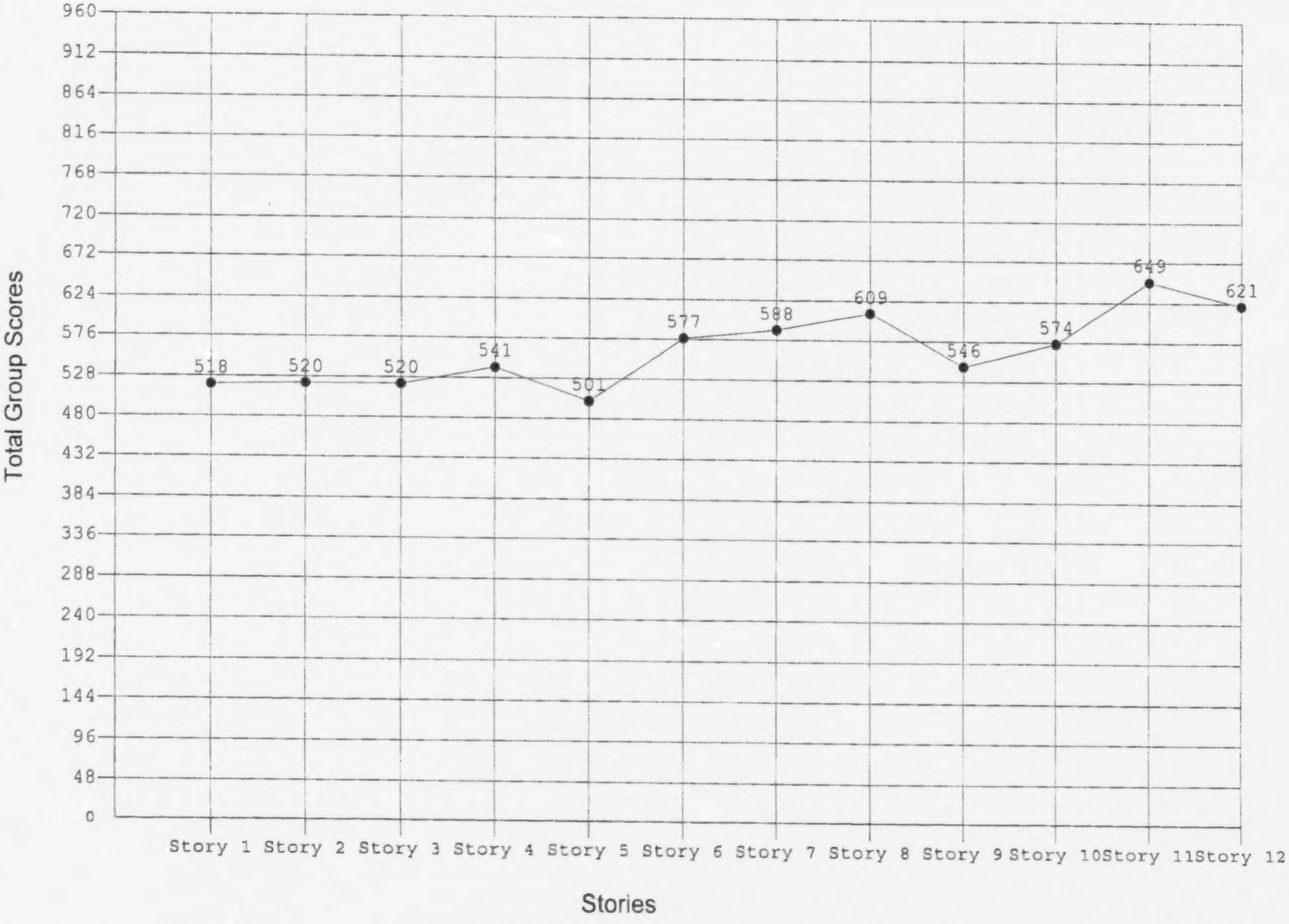
APPENDIX A

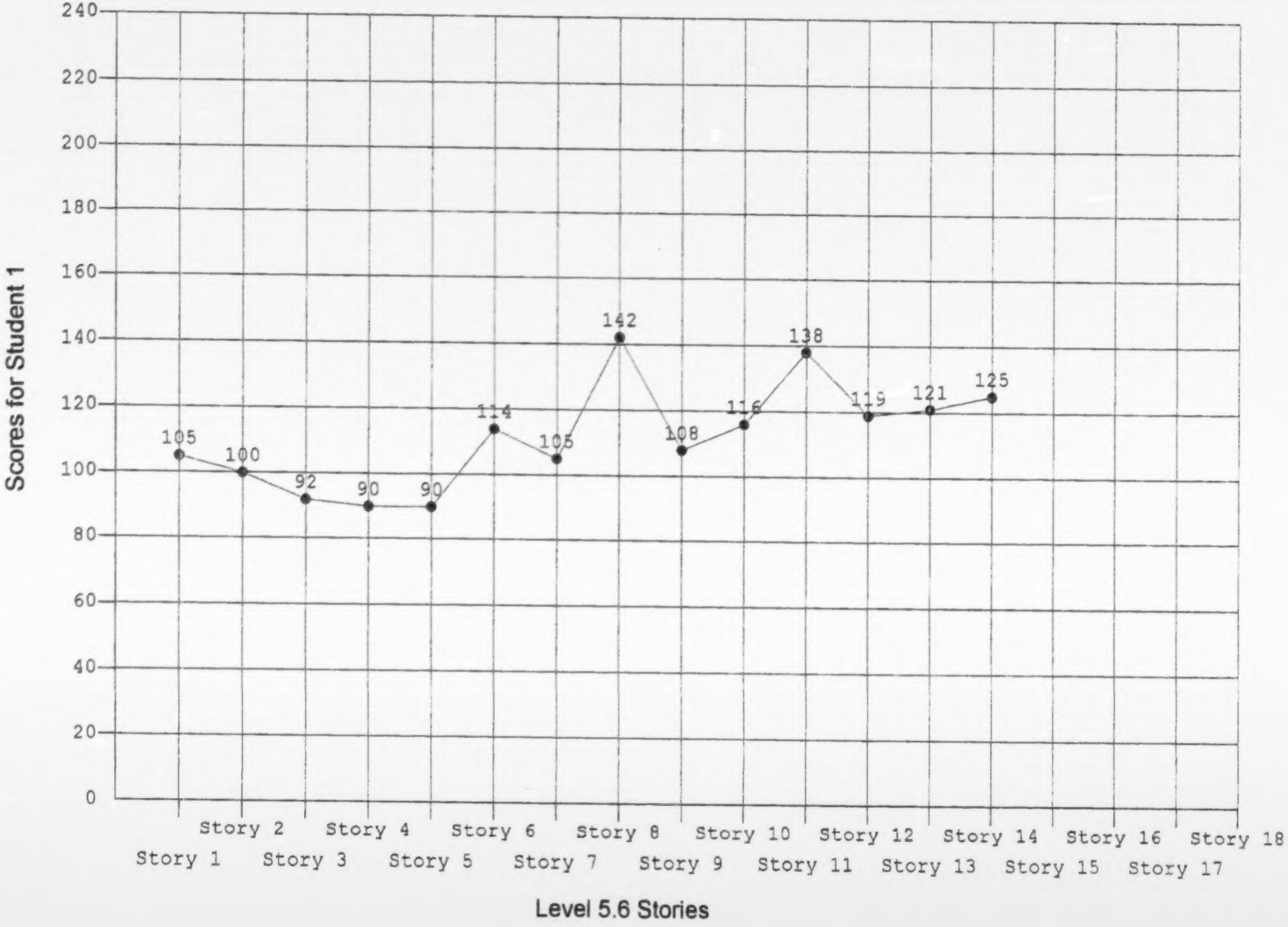
Total number of words read correct by the group on level 5.6 stories 1 through 12 measuring only cold timings.

Read Naturally WCPM Cold Timings



Appendix B

Words read correct per minute for Student 1 on level 5.6 stories measuring only cold timings.

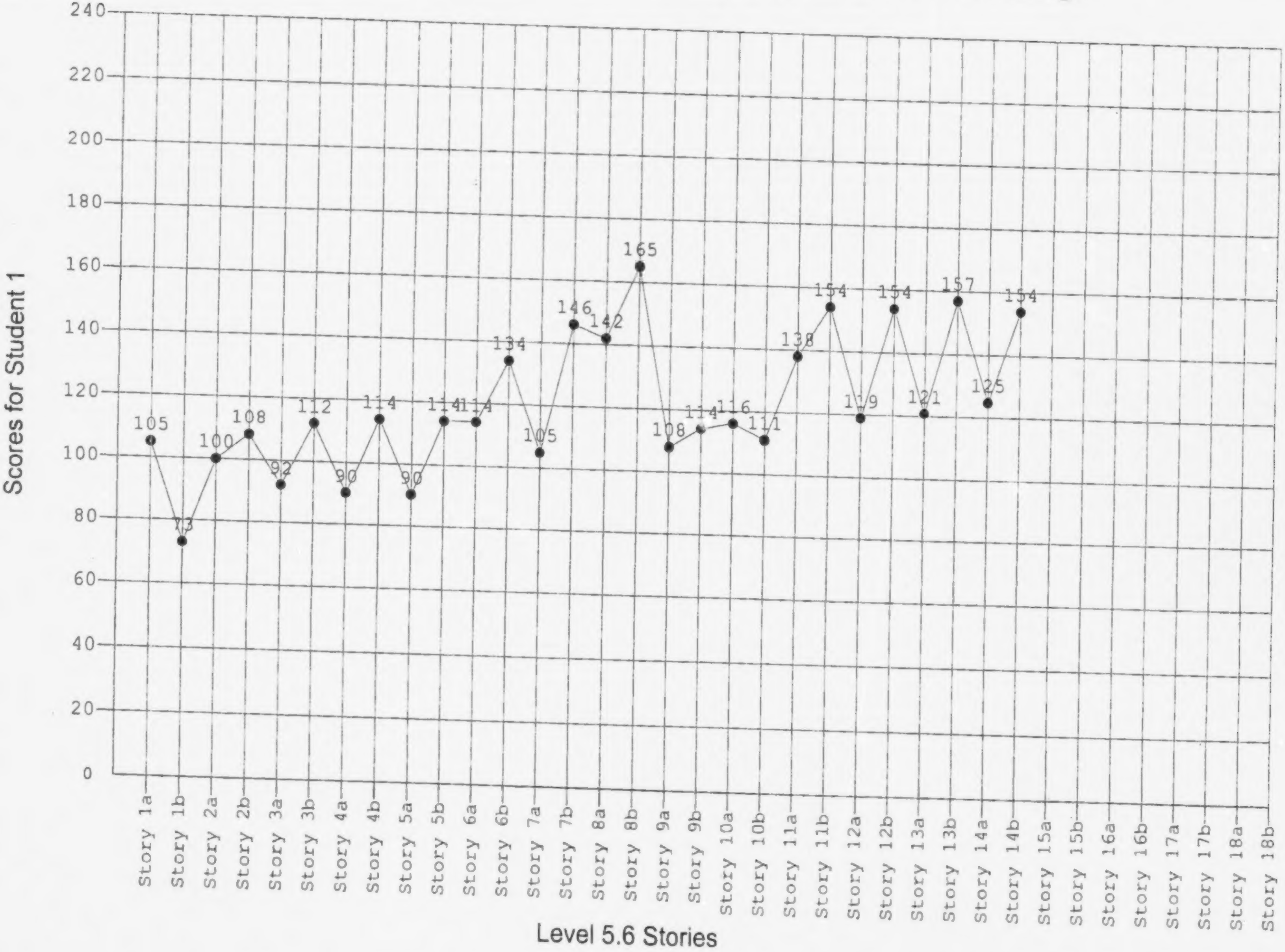


Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Cold Timings

Appendix C

Words read correct per minute for Student 1 on level 5.6 stories measuring both cold and hot timings.

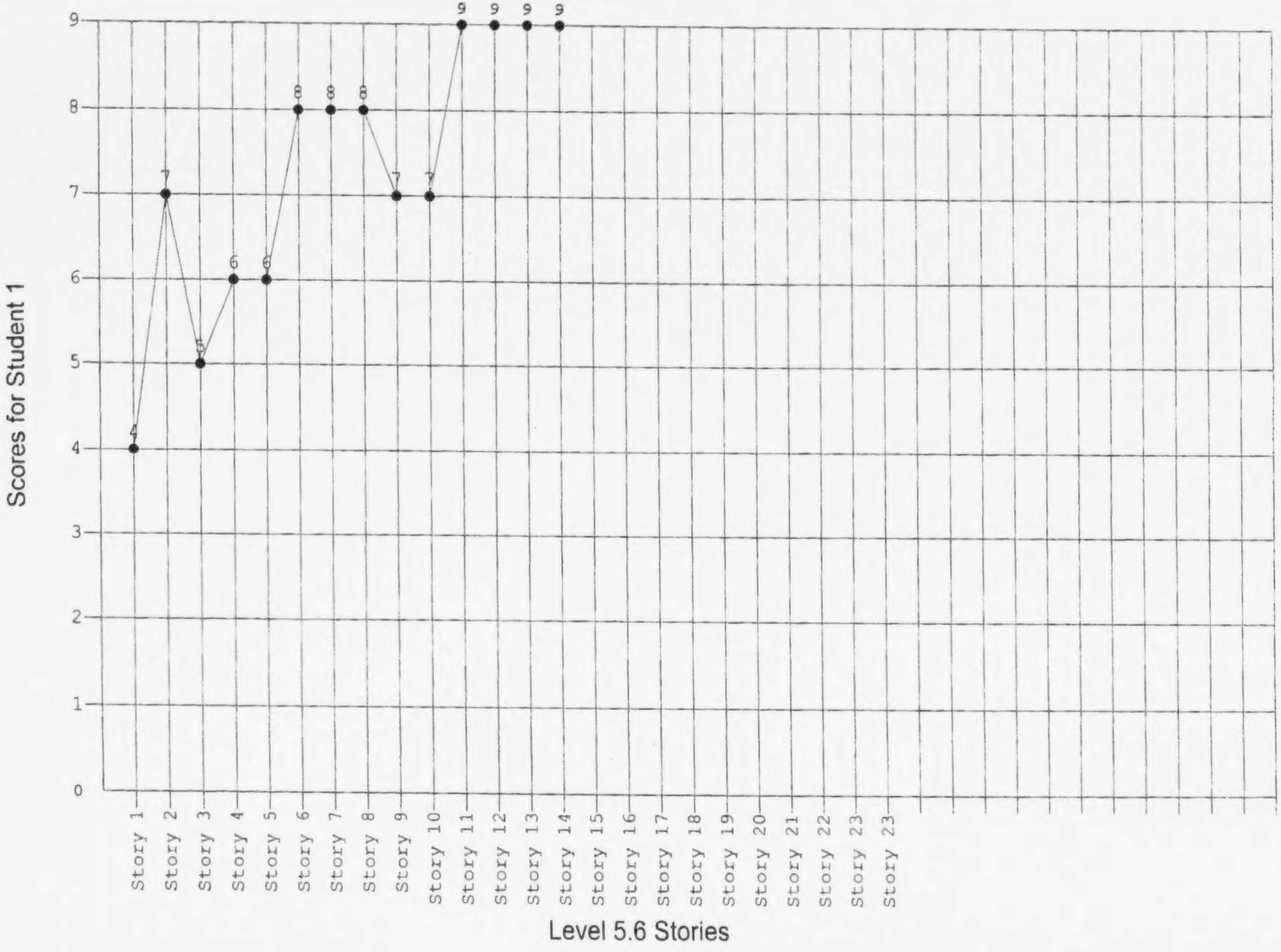
Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Comparing Cold and Hot Timings



Appendix D

Comprehension scores for Student 1 on level 5.6 stories (9 total questions).

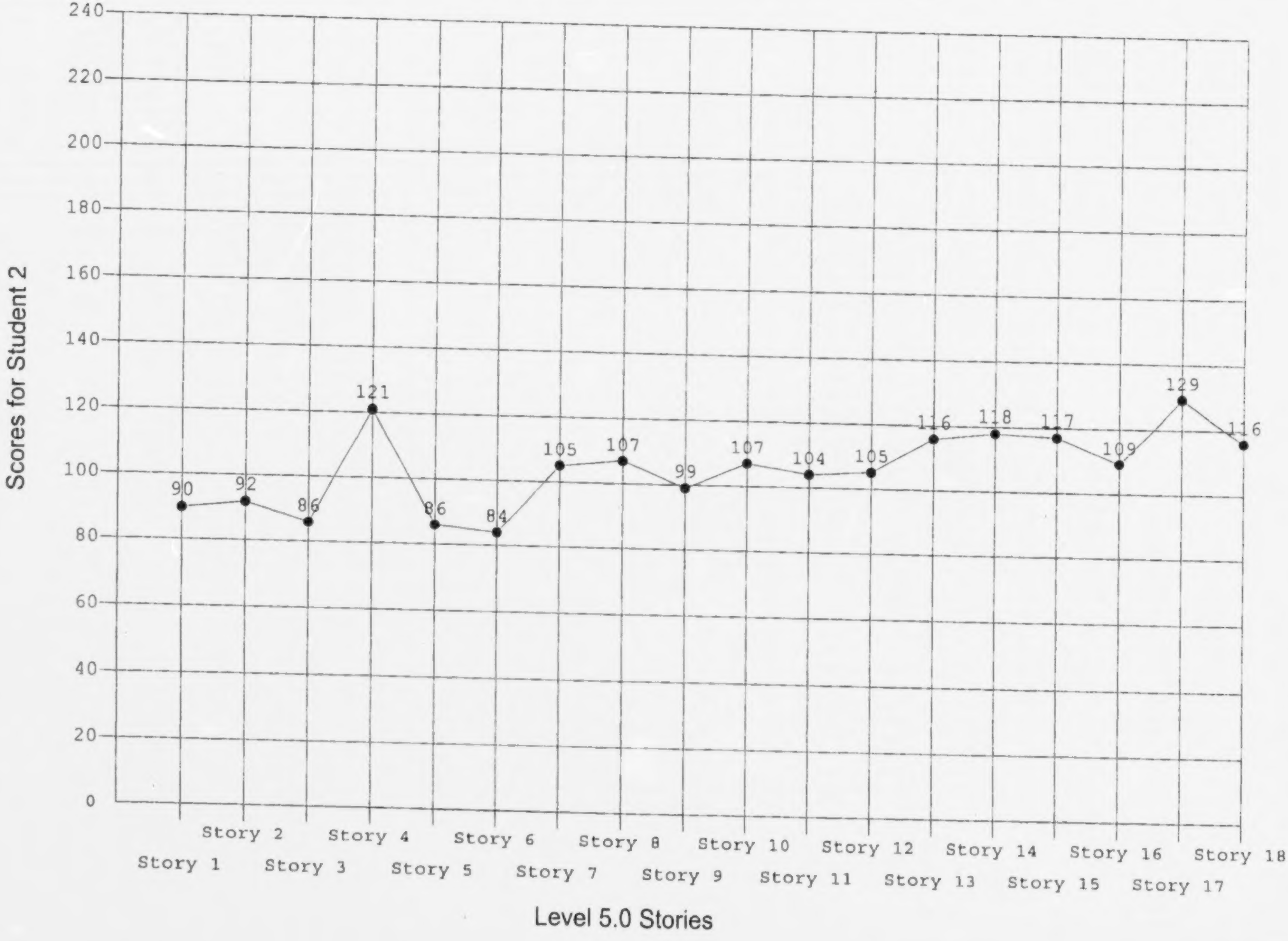
Read Naturally Comprehension Scores (9 Total Questions)



Appendix E

Words read correct per minute for Student 2 on level 5.0 stories measuring only cold timings.

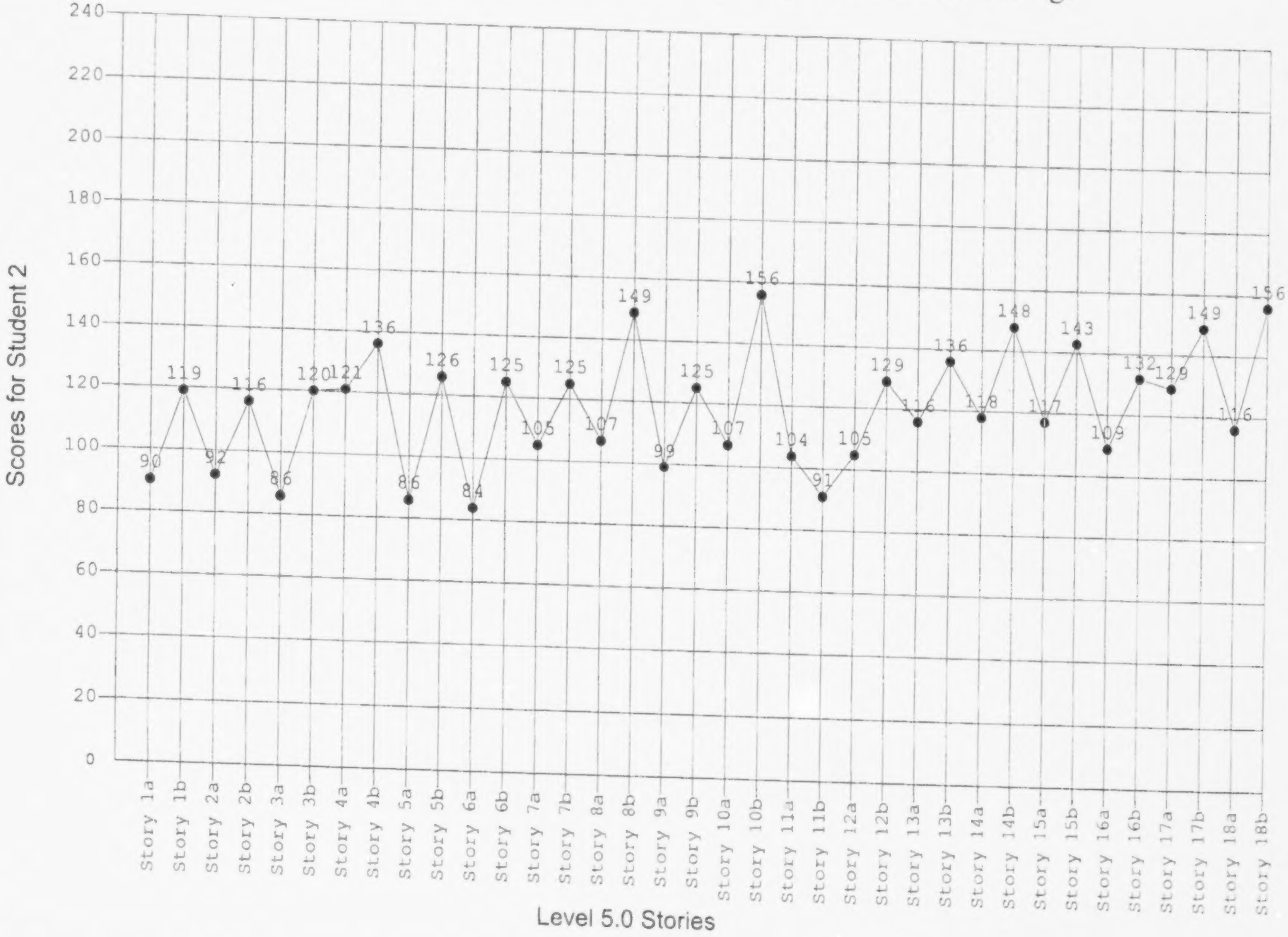
Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Cold Timings



Appendix F

Words read correct per minute for Student 2 on level 5.0 stories measuring both cold and hot timings.

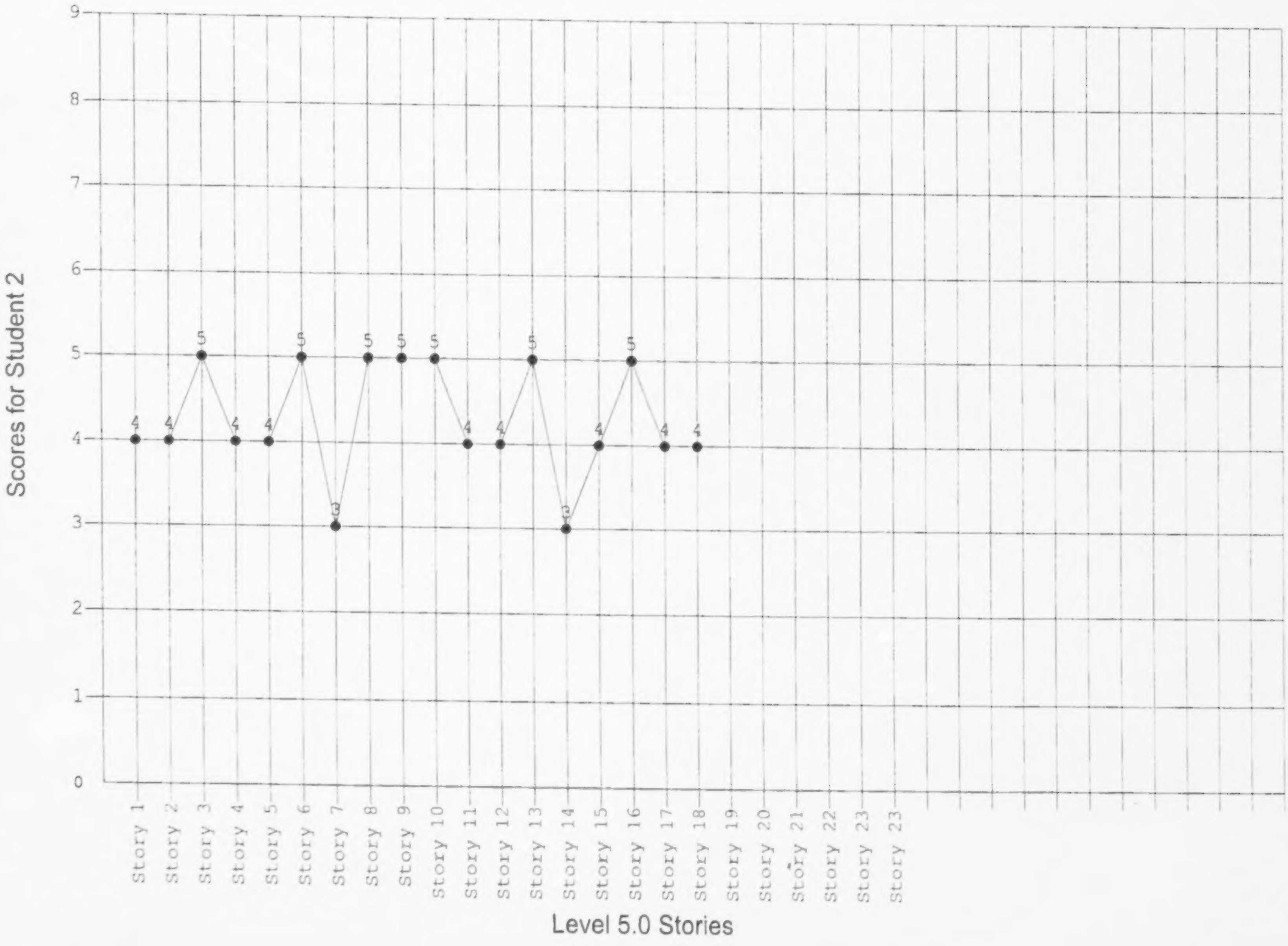
Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Comparing Cold and Hot Timings



Appendix G

Comprehension scores for Student 2 on level 5.0 stories (5 total questions).

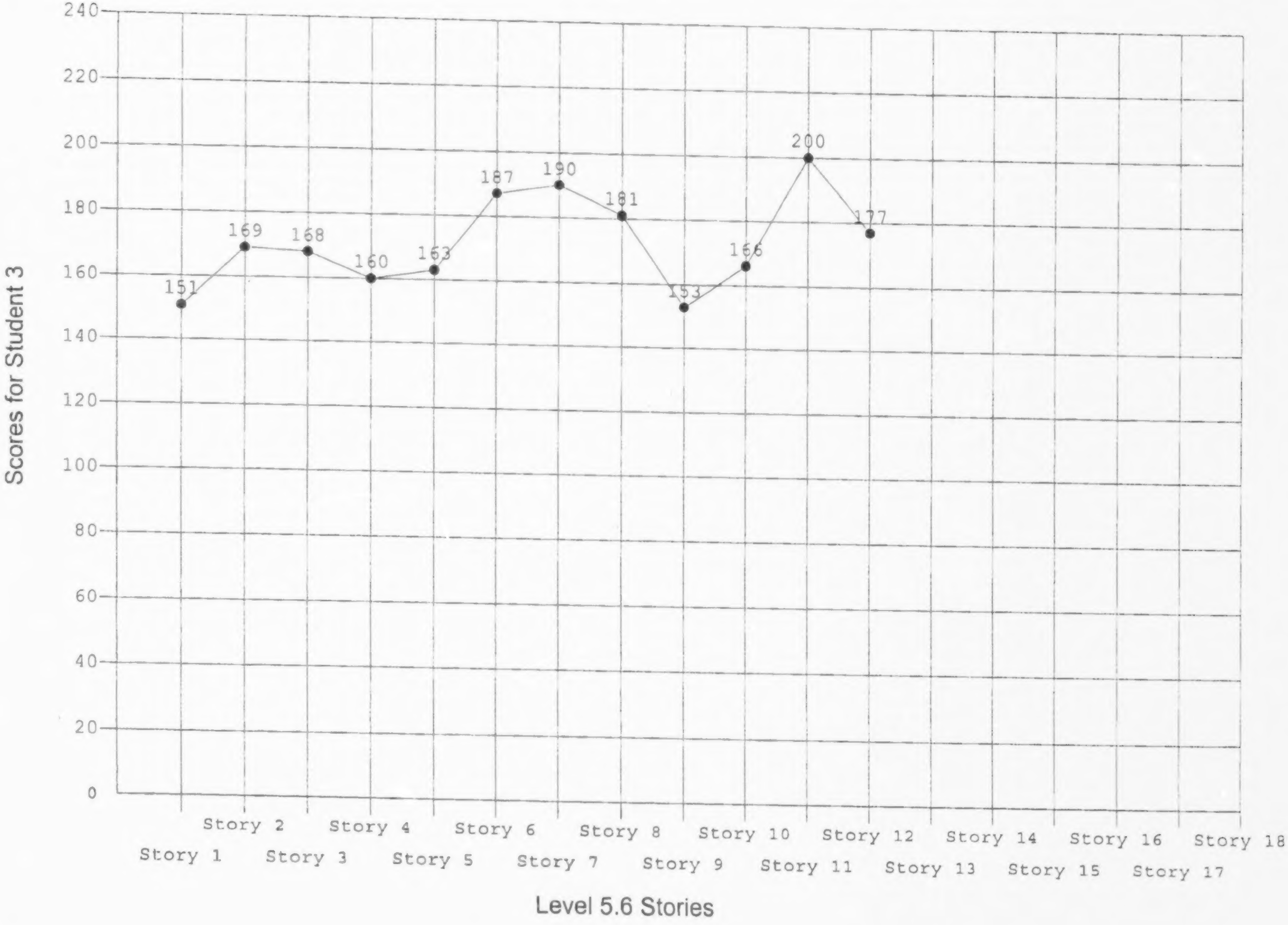
Read Naturally Comprehension Questions (5 Total Questions)



Appendix H

Words read correct per minute for Student 3 on level 5.6 stories measuring only cold timings.

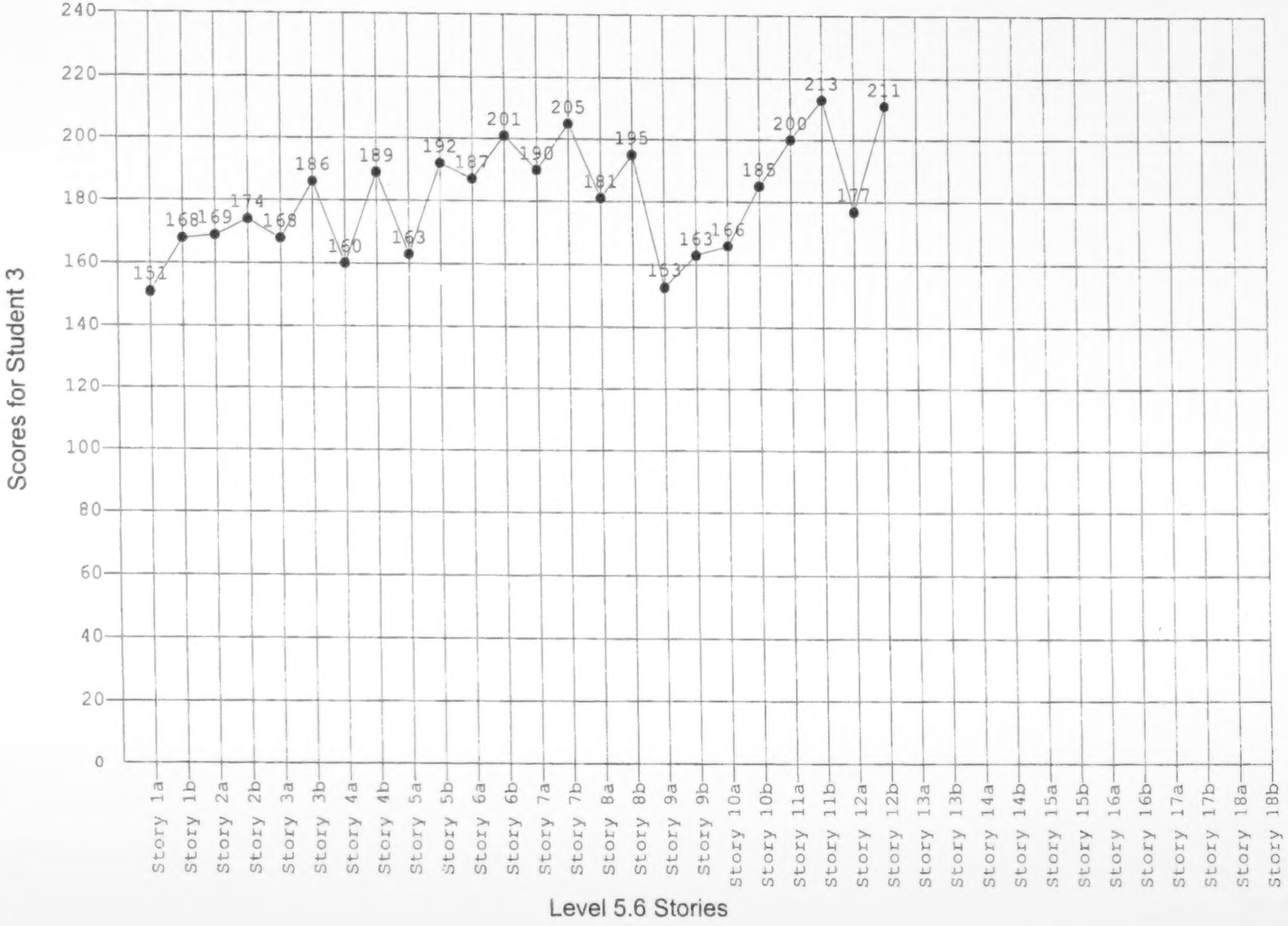
Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Cold Timings



Appendix I

Words read correct per minute for Student 3 on level 5.6 stories measuring both cold and hot timings.

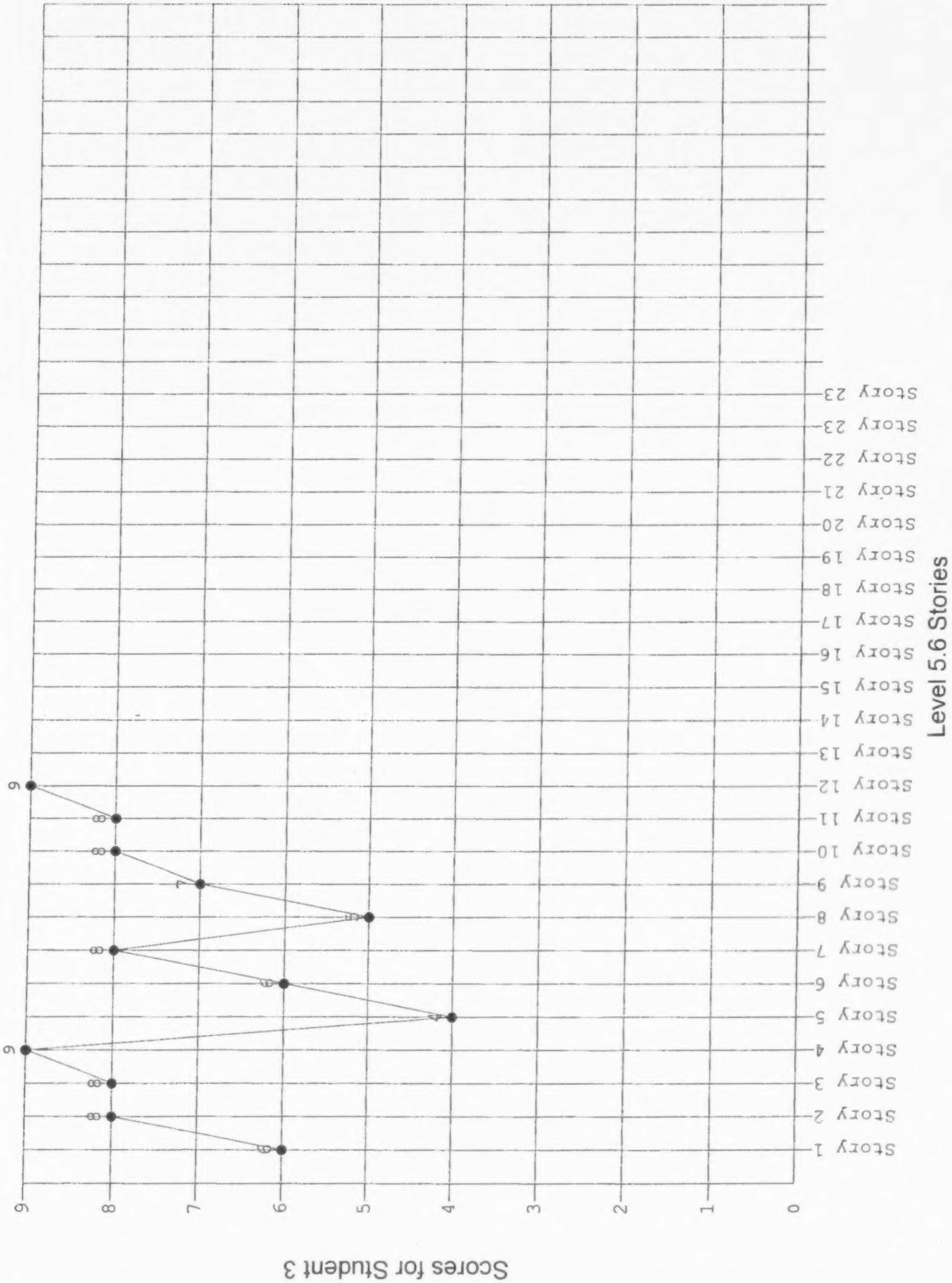
Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Comparing Cold and Hot Timings



Appendix J

Comprehension scores for Student 3 on level 5.6 stories (9 total questions).

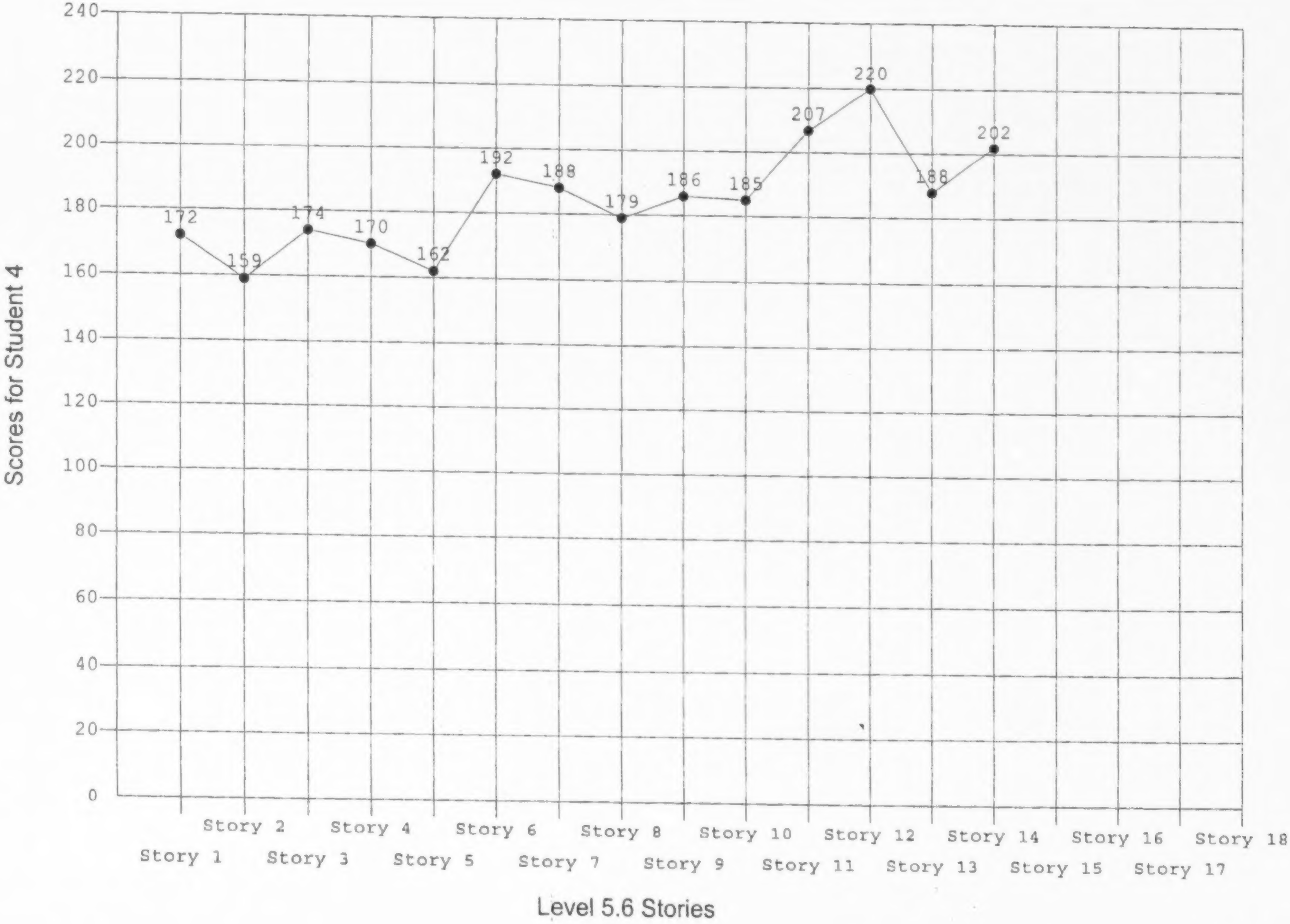
Read Naturally Comprehension Scores (9 Total Questions)



Appendix K

Words read correct per minute for Student 4 on level 5.6 stories measuring only cold timings.

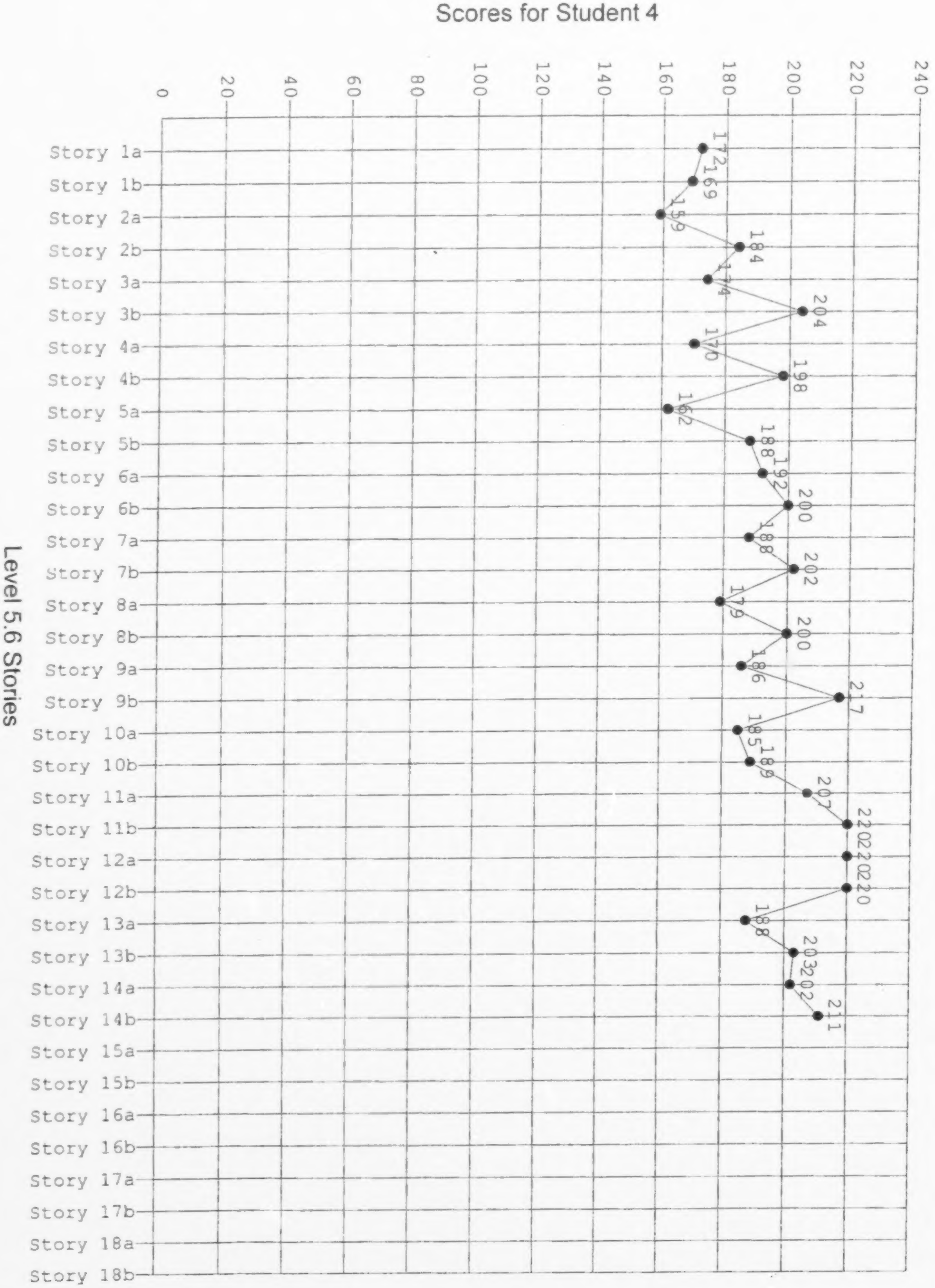
Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Cold Timings



Appendix L

Words read correct per minute for Student 4 on level 5.6 stories measuring both cold and hot timings.

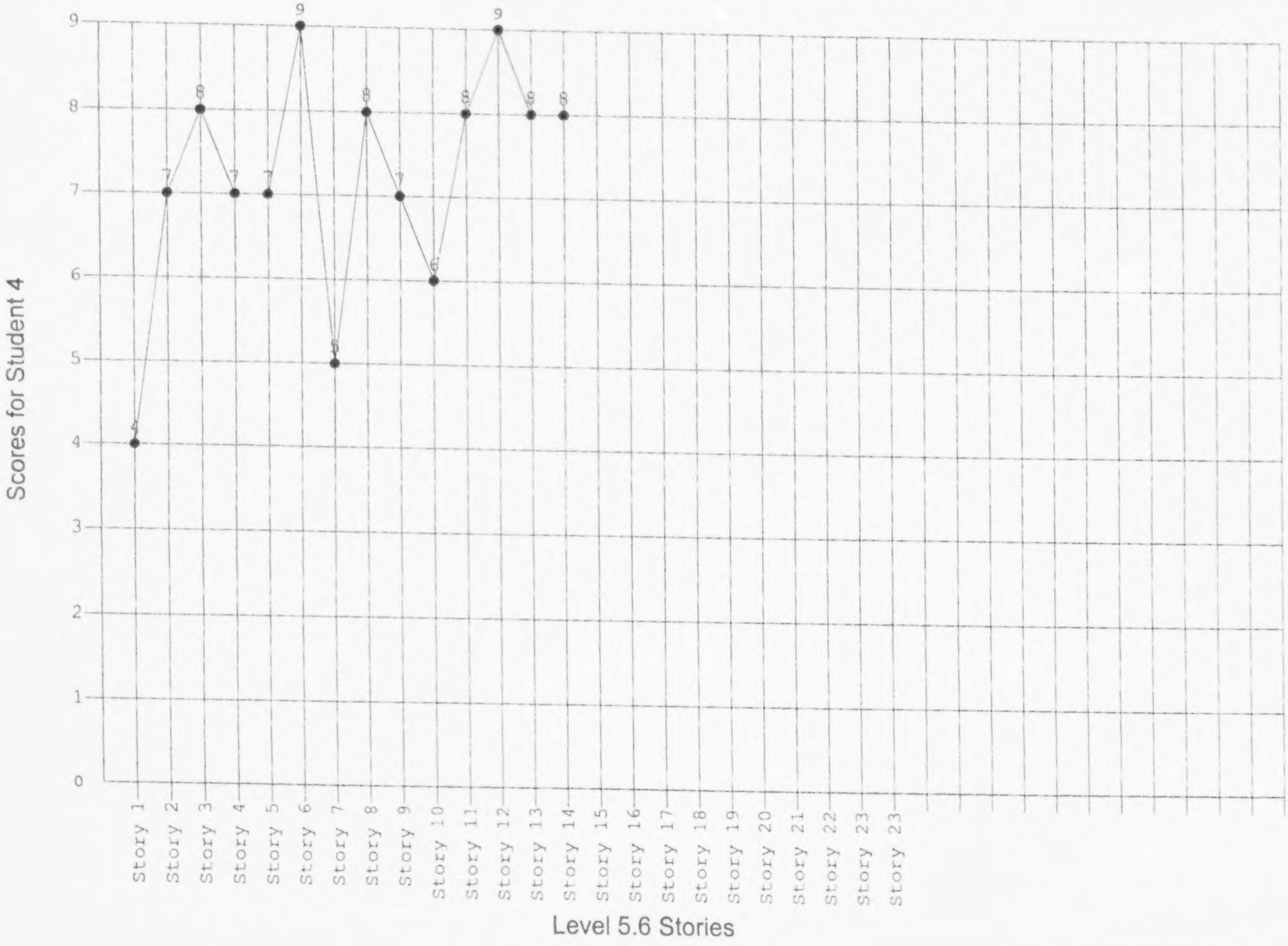
Read Naturally Fluency WCPM Comparing Cold and Hot Timings



Appendix M

Comprehension scores for Student 4 on level 5.6 stories (9 total questions).

Read Naturally Comprehension Scores (9 Total Questions)



The Graduate School

Of

Winona State University

Effects of Visual Phonics to improve reading fluency and decrease reading error rate in a remedial reading program.

Capstone Action Research Plan

by

Michelle Breitsprecher

A.A., Bethany Lutheran College, 1992

B.S., Winona State University, 1995

Master of Science Degree in Education

Fall of 2002

Rochester Learning Community Number 4

This action research entitled:
Effects of Visual Phonics to improve reading fluency and decrease reading error rate in a remedial reading program.
Written by Michelle Breitsprecher
has been approved for Master of Science Degree in Education
through The Graduate School of Winona State University,
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Jill Dahl 11-03-02
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Margaret Lundquist/ Graduate Advisor **Date**

Myrna Luehmann 11/6/02
Myrna Luchmann/ Superintendent **Date**

The final copy of this action research has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline

ABSTRACT

Breitsprecher, Michelle (M.S., Education [Winona State University])

Effects of Visual Phonics to improve reading fluency and decrease reading error rate in a remedial reading program.

Action Research directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman and Margaret Lundquist

There are 26 alphabet letters that make up 44 sounds used in the English language, and 398 variant spellings for these 44 sounds (ICLI, 1997). Our alphabet system and our sound system are two completely different systems in our English language, but are consistently used side by side. Visual Phonics is a tool that is used to learn, read and spell by using only the 44 phonemes in our English language. Each Visual Phonic sound is represented by hand signs and written symbols of what visually and kinesthetically happens when each phoneme is produced in relation to our mouths.

The intent for this action research was to determine if using Visual Phonics as a tool would help my remedial reading students improve the rate at which they read. I formed two hypotheses: Visual Phonics will improve students' rate of decoding words which affects their reading fluency, and all students with varying disabilities will decrease their reading error rate after being taught Visual Phonics.

Eight students were taught reading without Visual Phonics for nine weeks and then taught reading with Visual Phonics for nine weeks. During every reading lesson each student was required to go through guided teacher instruction, read his/her new story with me, reread the story to themselves, reread the story to another adult and complete worksheet pages related to his/her story. The second nine weeks the

students used Visual Phonic symbols during their reading instruction. Data for reading growth was shown through one minute timed readings and reading error rates.

This action research data suggests that using Visual Phonics as a decoding tool with remedial reading students will decrease reading error rates allowing students to learn to read at a quicker pace and giving them better reading success. Because of the curriculum based assessment tools used, I can not validate that using Visual Phonics would increase individual student's reading fluency. With the observations that I have seen through this study and my continued experience with Visual Phonics, I feel that another study should be completed to determine the effectiveness that Visual Phonics has on reading fluency.

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate my capstone project to all my remedial reading students, now and in the future. I hope the knowledge gained will benefit many students with their academic success. I also dedicate my work on this project to Eric, Brandon, Peyton, and Emma who have been so patient and wonderful in supporting my work/ education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Katie Ulwelling, who introduced me to Visual Phonics and trained me in a way that got me excited and willing to use Visual Phonics in my classroom. I would also like to acknowledge Lee Pool who monitors the way I use Visual Phonics and keeps me on my toes to find new ways to incorporate Visual Phonics in the classroom.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

During this action research I taught in a multicategorical elementary special education program at Fillmore Central Elementary School. Fillmore Central Elementary School is located in Preston, Minnesota. Fillmore Central is a school district comprised of six area towns: Preston, Harmony, Fountain, Granger, Greenleafton, and Cherry Grove. The total student population in grades K-8 is approximately 460.

Last year, there were two special education teachers employed at Fillmore Central Elementary School. One part time teacher taught both special education and physical education, while I taught full time special education. I case managed an average of eighteen students per year ranging in all disability categories (Mild to Moderate Mentally Impaired, Severely Multiply Impaired, Autistic, Specific Learning Disabled, Other Health Impaired and Physically Impaired). The majority of these students received special education services at a Federal Setting II, which means they were pulled out of regular education classes more than 21% of the day but less than 60%. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show an illustration of the special education needs at Fillmore Central Elementary School, during the 2001-2002 school year. (See definition of terms for description of settings.)

Figure 1 Federal Settings

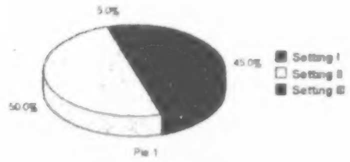
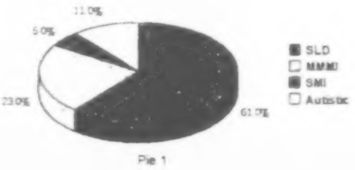


Figure 2 Disabilities



During pullout instruction I taught handwriting, written expression, reading, spelling, job training skills, social skills and behavior modification lessons.

Need for the Study

The subject I teach most frequently is remedial reading. Therefore, I was very interested in finding appropriate and effective reading tools to help my students succeed in reading. During my third year of teaching, I noticed I was beginning to use hand gestures to represent sounds my students struggled with. I continued with these "teacher made" gestures for two years until I was introduced to Visual Phonics in the fall of 2000 and again in the fall of 2001 through Visual Phonic workshops led by Katie Ulwelling and hosted by Root River Education District.

Statement of the Problem

Through this action research project, I hoped to gain insight on the benefits and/or weaknesses of Visual Phonics. My biggest concern was those students who struggle with reading and lose nearly four months of instruction during the summer months. I wanted to find a better approach for them to succeed with and retain their reading skills. This brings me to why I wanted to find out the effects of Visual Phonics on improving reading fluency and decreasing reading error rate in a remedial reading program.

Statement of the Question

My intent for this action research was to determine if using Visual Phonics as a tool would help my remedial reading students improve the rate at which they read. I formed two hypotheses: Visual Phonics will improve students' rate of decoding words which affects their reading fluency, and all students with varying disabilities will decrease their reading error rate after being taught Visual Phonics.

Definition of Terms

The definitions below are defined for the purposes of this study:

Reading Fluency is defined as the number of words read correctly in one minute.

Reading Error Rate is defined as the number of words read incorrectly or skipped, divided by the number of words in a given passage (i.e., 10 errors out of 100 word passage, is equal to a 10% error rate).

Kinesthetic Learning Style is defined as learning information through movement.

Visual Learning Style is defined as learning through pictures and/or seeing information.

Auditory Learning Style is defined as learning through saying and/or hearing information.

Remedial Reading is defined as an alternative reading program that takes the student out of the mainstream classroom to a setting where the student learns at his/ her level and pace.

Curriculum Based Assessment is defined by measuring students achievement skills with material from the mainstream curriculum to determine academic grade level.

Cognitive Ability is defined as the student's ability to perform academic work, measured by an IQ score (IQ is Intelligence Quotient).

Disability is defined by meeting Minnesota criteria to qualify for special education services (i.e. Specific Learning Disability, Mild to Moderate Mental Impaired, Speech/Language Impairment, Other Health Impaired, Autistic, Severely Multiply Impaired).

Visual Phonics is defined as a kinesthetic, auditory, and visual approach to teaching letter sounds which incorporates a system of moving hand signs that look and feel like the sounds they represent along with the oral pronunciation of the letter sound.

Federal Setting I is defined when a student is removed from regular education classes for less than 20% of the school day.

Federal Setting II is defined when a student is removed from regular education classes more than 21% of the school day but less than 60%.

Federal Setting III is defined when a student is removed from regular education classes more than 61% of the school day.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of factors that may have influenced the validity of this research. The following must be taken into account: the student's disability, cognitive ability, age, amount of service time given per day, attendance, longer breaks in second quarter compared to first quarter, all adults in the resource room setting are white females, and the rapport each student has with me, the researcher.

The biggest limitation of this study was inconsistent placement levels of the curriculum based assessment regarding the time periods in which I assessed. The curriculum based assessments I used to measure the students' growth at the beginning and end of each quarter or every nine weeks were placement tests taken from the Harcourt Brace reading series. Harcourt Brace is the reading series that Fillmore Central Elementary School uses to teach reading in the mainstream classrooms. Each placement test goes up one month's grade level, or equivalent to four school weeks, in difficulty for the first grade level. The remaining placement tests from grade two through grade four measure students at the beginning of that grade level and the middle of that grade level or equivalent to eighteen school weeks.

I felt that using the Harcourt Brace curriculum based assessment for measuring growth affected the validity of portions of this action research. This action research's growth was measured at quarter end or every nine weeks, not every eighteen weeks.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

There are 26 alphabet letters that make up 44 sounds used in the English language, and 398 variant spellings for these 44 sounds (ICLI, 1997). It makes one wonder how we are able to spell at all. Our alphabet system and our sound system are two completely different systems in our English language, but are consistently used side by side. It is no wonder these two separate systems with different rules and exceptions cause confusion for our slower and handicapped learners (Snow & Morrison, 1991).

Systems of many forms have been developed throughout history in an attempt to simplify our English language. However, none have been very successful until Visual Phonics. Visual Phonics is a tool that is used to learn, read and spell by using only the 44 phonemes in our English language. Each Visual Phonic sound is represented by hand signs and written symbols of what visually and kinesthetically happens when each phoneme is produced in relation to our mouths. The written symbols and hand signs used in Visual Phonics are easy to learn because they become meaningful and natural since the hand shape looks and feels like the sound they make. Visual Phonics reduces the ambiguities of spoken and written English to allow for the exceptions to the rules by using a multisensory approach (Smith-Stubblefield & Guidi).

Carol Hill developed the 44 signs and written symbols now known as Visual Phonics. Hill developed Visual Phonics within two weeks because she was frustrated with the progress her son, Mark, a nine year old profoundly deaf boy, was making with his language and communication skills. She had noticed that Mark was associating a line drawing and hand sign with the sound /s/ while working with his speech clinician. So Hill began making like symbols for all 44 English sounds. Each sound represents the look and feeling that a sound makes with relation to our mouth. Within five months of teaching Mark with the 44 signs and written symbols, Mark's language and math skills went from pre-K to a second grade level (ICLI, 1997; Marttila & Reicher, 2002).

Because of its effectiveness with Mark, Visual Phonics has been introduced in mainstream classrooms to help other deaf students. This is where teachers noticed Visual Phonics also helped slow readers. Reports of spelling improvements and reading improvements were being made (Snow & Morrison, 1991). In a study of kindergartners learning letter sounds, Slauson and Carrier (1992) summarized that Visual Phonics boosts students up a step, except for advanced learners who are neither positively nor negatively affected. Visual Phonics has been extended to teach English as a second language, speech, auditory discrimination, and to develop basic reading and writing skills in the general education classrooms.

In 1982, the International Communication Learning Institute, ICLI, was established. This nonprofit, noncommercial organization has helped support the development of Visual Phonics. Since that time, the use of Visual Phonics has expanded from use in programs for the deaf and hard of hearing to other programs that help individuals learn to read and speak (Marttila & Reicher, 2002). ICLI was organized by professionals and lay volunteers who wanted to help disadvantaged students learn language skills (Snow & Morrison, 1991).

One misconception is that Visual Phonics is another form of cued speech. The difference between cued speech and Visual Phonics is that cued speech uses hand shapes and hand positions to represent different syllables. Visual Phonics uses hand cues and written symbols in relation to the sounds they make (Wilson-Favors, 1987). Some cued speech systems that were developed include the Peabody Rebus Reading program, Blissymbolics, and sign language (ICLI, 1997; Smith-Stubblefield & Guidi). As a result of these complex systems, many people fear that learning Visual Phonics overloads the already frustrated learner. It does not help that the current research regarding Visual Phonics can be persuasive and argumentative.

One major advantage of Visual Phonics from a speech clinician's perspective was that Visual Phonics system's hand cues were easily integrated into the speech therapy approach (Wilson-Favors, 1987). I have also found this to be true regarding integrating Visual Phonics in my remedial reading and writing programs. It was very easy for me to implement Visual Phonics into my current reading and writing curriculum once I was trained to use the symbols because I was able to use only the sounds that the learners found challenging. The International Communication Learning Institute reports that Visual Phonics enhances the total language of a learner, including the learner's reading, writing and speech skills (ICLI, 1997). This has broadened my scope of using Visual Phonics within my remedial reading and writing programs.

I found it insightful how ICLI summarized the importance of using Visual Phonics to teach language: Visual Phonics opens a door for those who do not have access to all of the learning modes; it gives them access to something that they have not had before, and it is a light going on that permits them to read, to think, to feel, to learn language, and to communicate as we all communicate (ICLI, 1996).

My goal was to find out the effects of Visual Phonics in improving reading fluency and decreasing reading error rate in a remedial reading program. In the following section I will explain who I chose for the study and how I tested my hypotheses: Visual Phonics will improve students' rate decoding words which affects their reading fluency, and all students with varying disabilities will decrease their reading error rate after being taught Visual Phonics.

CHAPTER III
DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Participants

I sent out letters to parents (Appendix A) to obtain permission and inform them of my intent to use Visual Phonics in the classroom. Along with this letter, I sent a copy of all 42 Visual Phonics hand and written symbols. I chose eight students from my remedial reading class to use as subjects. All eight students read below grade level, qualified for special education reading services, and received a pullout remedial reading program following a direct instruction model, Reading Mastery. Six of the students in the study met Minnesota criteria for Specific Learning Disability. Two students, Student F and Student G, met Minnesota criteria for Mild to Moderate Mentally Impaired.

Table 1 below shows the disability, area of specific learning disability (SLD), and cognitive ability of each of the eight students as measured through Intelligence Quotient scores.

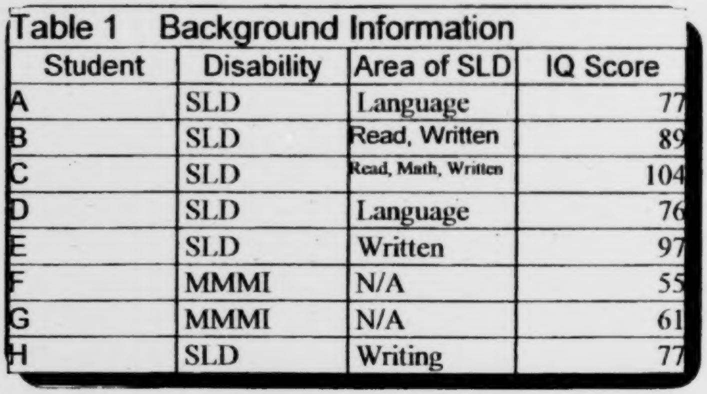


Table 1 Background Information

Student	Disability	Area of SLD	IQ Score
A	SLD	Language	77
B	SLD	Read, Written	89
C	SLD	Read, Math, Written	104
D	SLD	Language	76
E	SLD	Written	97
F	MMMI	N/A	55
G	MMMI	N/A	61
H	SLD	Writing	77

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Procedures

All eight students in the study were at different reading levels in the remedial reading program. During reading class, I worked with each student separately or in a pair at different lesson points. Visual Phonic symbols were used with each lesson on words that individual students found challenging or when introducing new sounds.

Prior to using Visual Phonics with students reading higher than first grade level, I introduced the symbols to them in small groups. In the small groups, I taught all vowel sounds and consonant sounds. We blended consonant, vowel, consonant sounds using only Visual Phonics. This was done about three times a week in fifteen minute sessions.

During every reading lesson each student was required to go through guided teacher instruction, read his/her new story with me, reread the story to themselves, reread the story to another adult, and complete worksheet pages related to his/her story. Visual Phonics written symbols were written in the story the first time they read the story with me. Written and visual symbols during oral reading were used with only the words the student struggled to read.

Data Collection Tools

Harcourt Brace is the reading curriculum that Fillmore Central School District uses to teach reading in the general education classrooms in grade kindergarten through grade four. The assessments are intended for grade placement within the Harcourt Brace reading series. This assessment is also used in the school district to assess if a student is reading at grade level in the mainstream classroom. Therefore, the assessments coincide with each book level. The levels go as such: 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, and 4. I chose the level that I felt best fit the individual student when I gathered their baseline in reading fluency and reading error rate.

I assessed each student individually at a table facing a white wall. During the assessment period, I used a photocopied sheet of the assessment to randomly time the student to get his/her reading fluency rate. This was done two to three times randomly throughout the assessment. The rates were averaged to get one rate that was used to analyze time readings. I used a watch containing a second hand to time each student. I felt that a stopwatch's beep would distract the student or make him/her more anxious. Each reading fluency rate was documented on the photocopied sheet with a bracket to indicate the beginning and end of one minute. I also documented all errors in the reading, including misread or omitted words, by circling the misread words and slashing the omitted words.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores of each student were documented in Table 1 in order to analyze if cognitive ability affected the success rates Visual Phonics had with students' improved reading rates. IQ scores were obtained from each student's last comprehensive assessment. The Fillmore Central School psychologist used either Woodcock-Johnson-Revised, Woodcock Johnson-III, Weschler Intelligence Scales for Children or the Kaufman Brief Intelligence assessment to obtain student IQ scores.

Data Collection

I obtained individual baselines on the eight students using curriculum based assessments from the mainstream reading textbook, Harcourt Brace. After one quarter of teaching the students from the direct instruction Reading Mastery series only, I used the same level in the curriculum based assessment to measure the growth of each student. Measurement of growth was charted and analyzed through reading fluency and by calculating the reading error rate of each student. Reading fluency rates were calculated by averaging the number of words read correctly from two to three one minute timed readings, timed randomly throughout the reading assessment. Reading error rates were calculated by dividing the number of words read incorrectly or omitted by the total number of words in the reading assessment passage.

At the beginning of second quarter, I assessed each student on the next level in the curriculum based assessment to get a new baseline, except for Student A. Student A continued to struggle at the lowest placement level so I kept the student at that level. After using Visual Phonics along with the Reading Mastery series, I gathered final data regarding the growth of each student with the curriculum based assessment, Harcourt Brace, at the same level that was used to begin second quarter.

When individual testing was administered Visual Phonics was not present in any form for the student. I wanted to see if reading success could be seen with written text only.

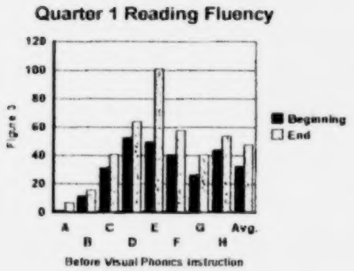
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF DATA

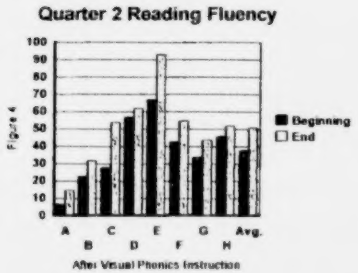
Process

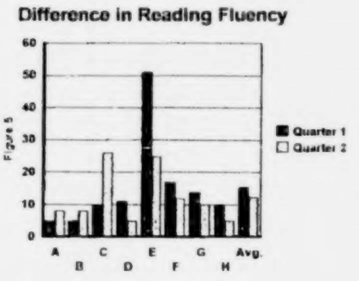
I assessed reading fluency and reading error rate at the beginning and end of first and second quarter. The differences between the beginning and end were how I determined if each individual student improved in the reading program with or without Visual Phonics. Raw data is documented as Appendix B on page 21.

Results

I compared the increase in reading fluency between the beginning and ending rates of each quarter and each student. The results are shown in Figures 3 & Figure 4.



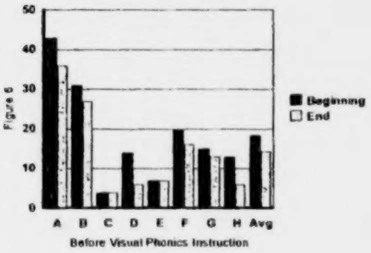




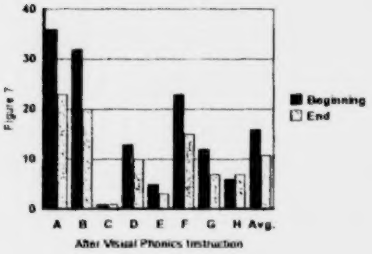
When comparing the bar graphs they show that all eight students increased his/her reading fluency during first and second quarter. The difference of their growth is shown in Figure 5. My prediction was that second quarter would show a bigger difference between reading fluency rates, suggesting that Visual Phonics affects reading fluency in a positive manner. The results indicated my hypothesis, that Visual Phonics improves students' rate of learning to decode words which affect their reading fluency, to be true for three of the eight students tested. The overall growth between first quarter and second quarter as shown in the average column was higher during first quarter, before visual phonics was introduced. The validity of these results for reading fluency is skewed due to the assessment that I used to gather the reading fluency growth. Each Harcourt Brace placement test goes up one month's grade level, or equivalent to four school weeks, in difficulty at the first grade level. The remaining Harcourt Brace placement tests from grade two through grade four measure students at the beginning of that grade level and the middle of that grade level or an equivalent of every eighteen school weeks. I assessed the students at the end of nine school weeks. This may have been too high of expectations for remedial reading students to read in such a short time period.

My second hypothesis was that all students with varying disabilities would decrease their reading error rate after being taught Visual Phonics. I compared the decrease of reading error rate between the beginning and end of each quarter. I predicted that second quarter would show a lower reading error rate than first quarter. The data indicated this hypothesis to be true for six of the eight students tested. One student's reading error rate had no change and one student's error rate decreased by eight percent. I feel that this data is valid because it was testing the increase in the ability to read a given passage even if the passage was at a level that was possibly too difficult for the individual student. Figures 6, 7 and 8 show the individual and average reading error rates for each student during quarter one and quarter two. The raw data can be found in Appendix B on page 21.

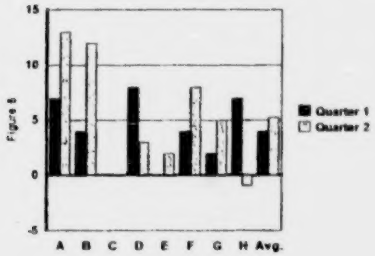
Quarter 1 Error Rate



Quarter 2 Error Rate



Difference in Reading Error Rate



CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The data from this action research suggests that using Visual Phonics as a decoding tool with remedial reading students will decrease their reading error rate allowing them to read at a quicker pace and give them better reading success. Because of the curriculum based assessment tool used, I can not validate that using Visual Phonics would increase individual student's reading fluency. With the observations that I have seen through this study and my continued experience with Visual Phonics, I feel that another study should be completed to determine the effectiveness that Visual Phonics has on reading fluency. If I completed another study I would use an alternative baseline testing assessment that tested students at their reading level with a gradual increase of difficulty.

I was very pleased to see that all eight students tested maintained or decreased their reading error rate and increased their reading fluency from the start of both quarters to the end of the respective quarter. The data gathered showed students progressed with and without Visual Phonics. I was pleased to see this because it validates that I am teaching my students to be better readers with the curriculum that I am currently using.

I have observed improved student compliance, lowered frustration levels and an increase in successful readers. Therefore, I will continue to use and incorporate Visual Phonics in my remedial reading classroom. I will also encourage general education teachers to incorporate Visual Phonics in their classrooms to build their students' language skills.

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Pool, Lee. Teacher of Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Root River Education District, 225 3rd Ave. SW, P.O. Box 544, Harmony, MN 55939. (507) 886-2636.

International Communications Learning Institute-ICLI. 7108 Bristol Blvd., Edina, MN 55435. (612) 929-9381.

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

In January of 2001, I started working towards a Masters Degree in Special Education through Winona State. My plan is to complete the program and graduate December 2002. As part of my education, I will complete a field study and a portfolio. Both of these items may contain your child's work. I would like your permission to use your child's school information to help me gather data and reflect on my teaching. I guarantee, if I have your permission, I will only use your child's first name on any document I might use. I will assume I have your permission unless I hear from you otherwise.

The field study I chose to research is the effects of visual phonics in the classroom to help students decode words. I want to research within the class to see if using visual phonics as a tool will help students improve the rate they learn to read. This study will give me concrete information to see the effectiveness of visual phonics or its ineffectiveness. Since this is the first year I have used Visual Phonics the results will help me determine if I should continue teaching Visual Phonics.

Again, I will assume I have your permission unless you call or write to me otherwise. If you have any concerns about the confidentiality of your child's work please call me at either 765-3809 or 765-5228.

Thank You,

Michelle Breitsprecher

Michelle Breitsprecher
Special Education Teacher

Dear Parents,

I have started a program called, VISUAL PHONICS, to help your child learn the sounds needed to help with reading. This program uses hand signals to show the sound a letter makes. These hand signals, along with a written symbol, show the sound of each letter. Visual phonics will be used as a tool along with regular reading instruction.

Visual Phonics allows your child to learn reading skills through visual, auditory, and kinetic learning styles. Working with your child in learning visual phonics will give them another way to remember the sounds of the letters. Later helping with decoding skills needed in reading.

Attached you will find a written description of the hand signals along with the written symbol of the sound of the letter. I wanted you to be aware of the program and the symbols that you may be seeing in their reading books. Give me a call with any questions or concerns, 765-3809 or 886-2787.

Sincerely,

Michelle Breitsprecher

Michelle Breitsprecher
Special Education Teacher

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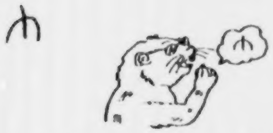
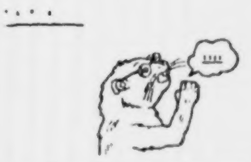
Long Vowel Sounds



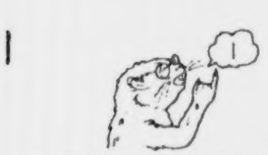
[illegible]

1. [illegible]
2. [illegible]
3. [illegible]
4. [illegible]
5. [illegible]
6. [illegible]



[illegible]

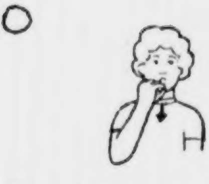
1. The written symbol for this hand sign is a long straight line representing your thumb, and four short horizontal lines representing your four fingers.
2. The sound represented by this symbol is found in the following words:
   eagle meet be machine bean complete [illegible] busy
3. This sound is also known as the "long e" sound.
4. The hand sign is the same as the fingerspelling sign for "E."
5. This symbol represents the same sound as [illegible] in the old Visual Phonics materials.
6. The "E" is the most frequently used vowel in the English alphabet.



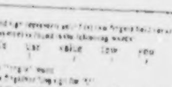
[illegible]

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] eye [illegible] kind might
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

[illegible] as in goat



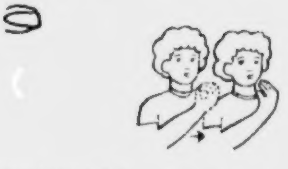
[illegible] an O with hand and move outward from mouth



[illegible]

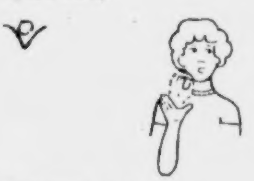
[illegible]
[illegible] found in the following words:
cucumber [illegible] [illegible] value [illegible] you
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

ŏŏ says ooh as in look



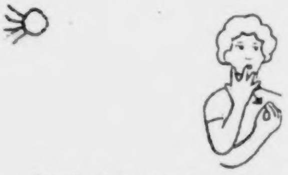
Place the hand in the flat O position, then open slightly toward mouth.

oi
oy say oi as in boy



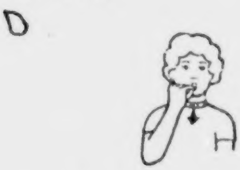
Make the O symbol with the hand. Quickly open the hand, keeping the fingers together, thumb extended.

ou
ow say ow as in cow



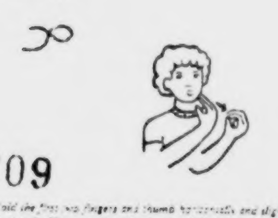
Open all the fingers facing the mouth. Move hand away from mouth and close to an O.

ô says aw as in frog



Make an O with hand and move outward from mouth.

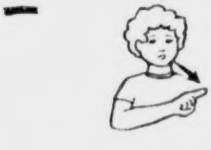
u says oo as in suit



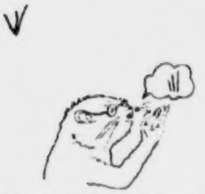
Hold the first two fingers and thumb horizontally and slightly [illegible] by mouth. Close to a flat O and move slightly away from mou[illegible]

Short Vowel Sounds

ă says ah as in cat



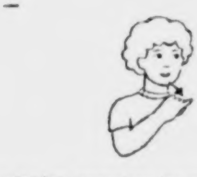
Move forefinger horizontally out from mouth



[illegible]

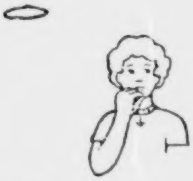
1. [illegible]
2. [illegible] found in the following words:
   elephant egg [illegible] [illegible] bread said many friend
3. [illegible]
4. [illegible] Visual Phonics materials.

ĭ says ih as in sit



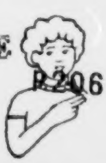
Move the little finger horizontally out from mouth

O says ah as in lot



Make a flat O with your hand and move outward from the mou[illegible]

ŭ says uh as in cut



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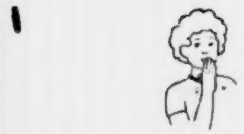
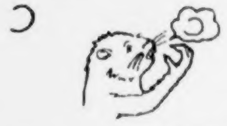
Consonants

says buh

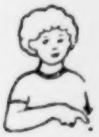


Jerk the vertically held-open hand forward once



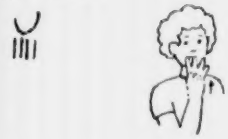
To produce this hand sign use your cupped hand toward face

[illegible]



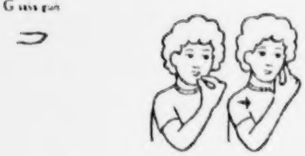
Make dot in air with forefinger by jerking downward once

says fuh (voiceless)

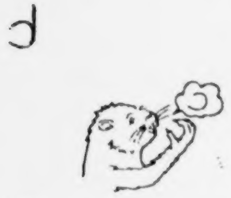


four fingers and thumb together, palm facing mouth. Flick the fingers off the thumb upward

G says guh



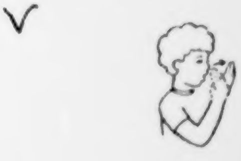
Close the horizontally held thumb and forefinger together, slightly open



To produce this hand sign use your cupped hand toward face

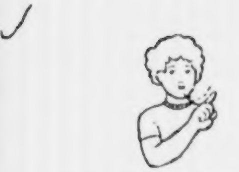
[illegible]

H says huh (voiceless)



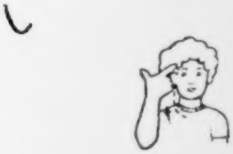
Start hand toward mouth, palm facing mouth. Move quickly to a [illegible] position away from mouth with a predictable motion.

says juh

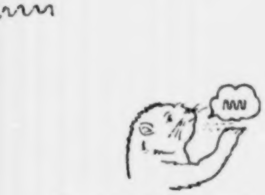


aw the J symbol in the air with the forefinger moving out from mouth

L says ll



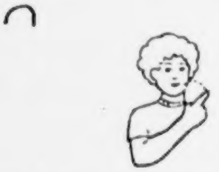
Draw the L symbol in the air with the forefinger [illegible] moving upward toward the mouth.



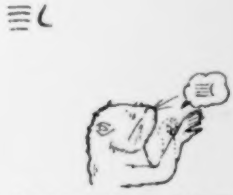
To produce this hand sign hold your fingers together and move them up and down while you move your hand away from your mouth

[illegible]

N says nn



Draw the N symbol in the air with the forefinger moving down from the mouth.



To produce this hand sign put your thumb and fingers facing away from your face. Flick your four fingers quickly off your thumb, like a small explosion.

[illegible]

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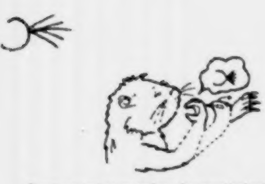
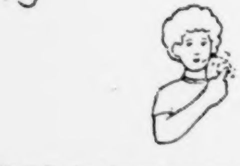


To produce this hand sign bring the fingers of your cupped hand together facing your mouth, then move your hand and open quickly away from your mouth

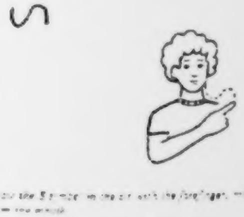
[illegible]

R says rr



Draw the R symbol in the air with the forefinger moving outward from the mouth

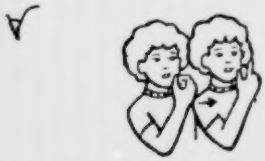
S says ss (voiceless)



Draw the S symbol in the air with the forefinger moving out from the mouth

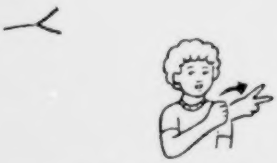
Consonants

T says tuh (voiceless)



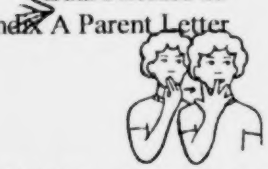
With palm facing you, flick forefinger quickly off the thumb.

V says vuh



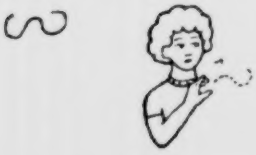
Open a closed fist, palm facing outward, to a V with the first two fingers, moving away from you.

W says wuh



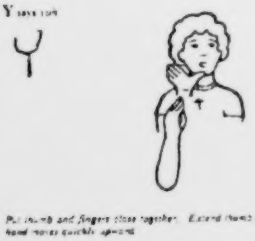
Put hand in flat O position, fingers toward mouth. Open quickly toward mouth.

X says kuh ss (voiceless)



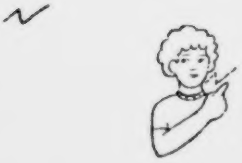
Jerk the cupped C hand forward once, then trace the curved lines with the index finger only.

Y says yuh



Put thumb and fingers close together. Extend thumb and fingers as hand moves quickly upward.

Z says zz



Draw the symbol in the air with the forefinger.

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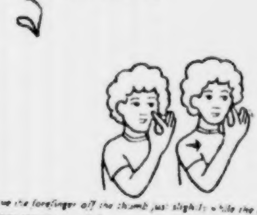
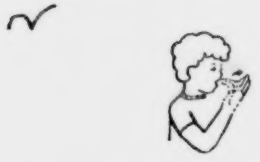
Blends

Th says thuh as in thin (voiceless)

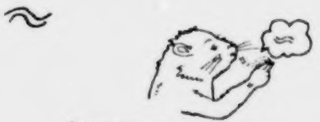


Move the forefinger off the thumb just slightly while the other fingers remain extended.

Ch says chuh



Move cupped hand, palm facing you, to an open position.



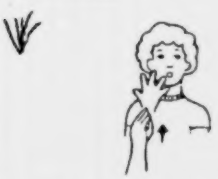
To produce this hand sign draw the symbol in the air with the first two fingers held horizontally.

1 The written symbol for this hand sign represents the symbol you draw in the air with your fingers.

2 The sound represented by this symbol is found in the following words:

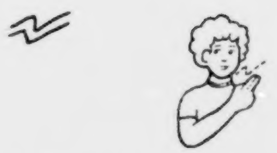
shell action sugar precious
machine mission anxious

Wh says wuh (voiceless)



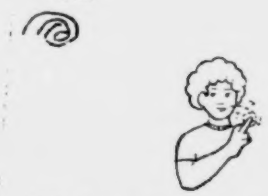
Put hand in flat O position. Open quickly upward.

Zh says zhuh



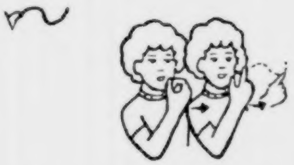
Draw the Z symbol in the air with the first two fingers.

ar says are



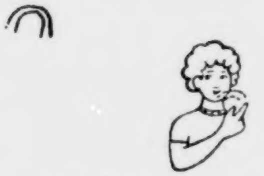
Cross the first two fingers and draw the R symbol in the air.

Ts says ts (voiceless)



With palm facing you, flick forefinger quickly off the thumb and draw the S symbol in the air with the forefinger.

ng says ng as in song



With the forefinger and the thumb opened slightly, draw the N symbol in the air.

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APPENDIX B1 Raw Data of Students' Reading Fluency Rates

Quarter 1 Start Reading Fluency	Quarter 1 End Reading Fluency	Quarter 2 Start Reading Fluency	Quarter 2 End Reading Fluency
2	7	7	15
11	16	23	32
32	41	28	54
53	64	57	62
50	101	67	93
41	58	43	55
27	41	34	44
44	54	46	52
32.5 Average	**47.75 Average**	**38.125 Average**	**50.875 Average**

APPENDIX B2 Raw Data of Students' Reading Error Rates

Quarter 1 Start Error Rate	Quarter 1 End Error Rate	Quarter 2 Start Error Rate	Quarter 2 End Error Rate
43	36	36	23
31	27	32	20
4	4	1	1
14	6	13	10
7	7	5	3
20	16	23	15
15	13	12	7
13	6	6	7
18.375 Average	**14.375 Average**	**16 Average**	**10.75 Average**

APPENDIX B3 Differences in Beginning and End of Quarter Assessments

Quarter 1 Reading Fluency	Quarter 2 Reading Fluency	Quarter 1 Error Rate	Quarter 2 Error Rate
5	8	7	13
5	8	4	12
10	26	0	0
11	5	8	3
51	25	0	2
17	12	4	8
14	10	2	5
10	5	7	-1
15.375 Average	**12.375 Average**	**4 Average**	**5.25 Average**

Winona State University

Rochester Graduate Learning Community IV

Capstone Project

Will incorporating the Building Blocks Reading and Writing Approach into a kindergarten curriculum increase literacy assessment scores?

Karmen Beyer

B.A. , Carroll College, 1995

A capstone submitted to the
Graduate School of Winona State University in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of
Master of Science
Department of Education
2002

This action research entitled:

Will incorporating the Building Blocks Reading and Writing Approach into a kindergarten curriculum increase literacy assessment scores?

Written by Karmen Beyer

has been approved by this evaluation team.

Suzanne Griffin-Ziebart

Kelly Hansen

Kelly Hansen

Margaret Lundquist

Margaret Lundquist, M.S.

Ann K Miller

Ann Miller

Dwight Miller

Sarah Ohm

Jon Wright

Jon Wright

The final copy of this capstone has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Beyer, Karmen (M.S. Education)

Will incorporating the Building Blocks Reading and Writing Approach into a kindergarten curriculum increase literacy assessment scores?

Capstone directed by Margaret Lundquist

Objective:

To determine whether or not the Building Blocks framework will improve students' literacy skills.

Procedures and Assessments:

1. Enlisted cooperation from another kindergarten teacher to use her class as a control group.
2. Administered literacy assessments to all kindergarten students in the first three weeks of September 2001.
3. Used teaching methods and activities from the Building Blocks framework throughout the school year.
4. Administered the same literacy assessment that was given in the fall, in May 2002.

Results:

The results of the study suggest that implementing Building Blocks into a kindergarten curriculum improved literacy assessment scores.

Recommendations:

I would recommend this method for any kindergarten teacher. It is a wonderful way to have a balanced literacy program in your classroom.

Overall, I was pleased with the results of my project, and after further observations I noticed a huge improvement in the students' writing abilities compared to past years. I had students writing 1-3 complete sentences in their journals on a daily basis. For a kindergartener that is amazing growth. This project has motivated me to learn more about how to teach writing to young children.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In past years, the Rochester School District has evaluated kindergarten students with an assessment given in the spring. Students were asked to recognize colors, upper & lower-case, letter sounds, numbers, phone number, address, birthday, and shapes. In 2001, the assessment changed dramatically. It shifted from those basic skills listed above to a focus on reading and language skills consisting of letter and sound recognition, concepts about print, rhyming words, segmentation of sentences and words, and isolating initial, final and medial sounds in words. (Appendix A) The Kindergarten Literacy Assessment was administered the third week of the 2001-2002 school year. My students scored low on this assessment. They retook the same test in May 2002 to measure their academic growth.

Need for Study

I felt that the current reading and writing curriculum did not support the requirements that are measured on this new assessment. I found a method called Building Blocks that focuses on balancing a reading and writing curriculum in kindergarten. I felt that it was a developmentally appropriate technique to use in kindergarten to teach the important skills needed to learn how to read and write.

Statement of the Problem

My kindergarten students scored low on the Kindergarten Literacy Assessment administered in the fall of 2001. I have determined whether implementing Building Blocks into my kindergarten curriculum has improved the May 2001 assessment scores.

Statement of the Question

Will incorporating the Building Blocks Reading and Writing Approach into a kindergarten curriculum increase literacy assessment scores?

Definition of Terms

The Building Blocks framework provides a variety of reading and writing experiences to enable children to develop six skills (six building blocks) in order to achieve success.

Desire To Learn To Read And Write: By modeling to children that that reading can provide information and enjoyment they develop a desire to learn how to read and write.

Language Concepts: Providing activities that will continue to add new words and meanings to their vocabulary

Print Concepts: Print concepts include learning how to turn the pages incorrectly in a book, reading words left to right, how to read a page from top to bottom, developing the concept of the return sweep when reading more than one line, etc.

Phonemic Awareness: The understanding that spoken words are made up of a series of discrete sounds. Most phonemic awareness activities are oral, based on listening and speaking and playing with sounds.

Interesting Words: Children will learn to read and write interesting words that have meaning to them. Environmental print is a good example (McDonalds, Cheerios, Toys R' Us).

Letters and Sounds: Children will be encouraged to learn letter and sound recognition through activities that are usually associated with interesting words that they have learned.

Limitation of Study

After conducting my research, there were some limitations of this study that needed to be considered. Throughout the school year students were absent due to illness or family trips. There were also some family situations that affected students' ability to learn at school due to changes in their sleeping/eating patterns.

The population at Franklin Elementary School is very diverse. There were 14 students in my classroom and 11 students in the control group whose primary language was not English.

Another aspect that needs to be considered was that the control group's teacher changed two times during the school year. The regular primary teacher taught for 7 days before she went on maternity leave. A long-term substitute teacher replaced her until January 3rd 2002.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Teachers are often told to teach whatever is "in". This happened with both the whole language movement in the 1980's, then again with phonics in the 1990's and, it happened at all grade levels. These programs worked for some children but not for all. Why? The reason is that different children learn differently! Children, even those in the same grade level, are at different stages of development. They are ready to learn different skills, and some of them are not ready for other skills without some prerequisites. Children, like adults, enjoy doing tasks in a way that is most natural or comfortable. How children learn and what they like to do varies from child to child just as it does from teacher to teacher. Children are not all stamped from the same cookie cutter. They do have real individual differences!" (Hall & Williams, 2000)

"Over the last three decades, kindergarten has changed from a place of social development to a place where mastery of certain skills are expected. It is a place where caring teachers build a strong foundation for literacy learning. (Hall & Williams, 2000) In the late 1980's a program called the Four Blocks Model was created by Dr. Patricia Cunningham. It was piloted in a first grade classroom with the assistance of Dottie Hall and Margaret DeFee. Proving to be successful, years later other schools and districts around the country experienced encouraging results using the Four Blocks Model. The model is based on the premise that there are four basic approaches to teach reading. The instructional plan ensures that all children are exposed to all four methods every day. This model was easily implemented into first and second grade classrooms just as it was designed. At the upper grades, adaptations needed to be made to accommodate the difficulty of the curriculum and the developmental differences of the children. With the success of the 4 Blocks Model, teachers were eager for a kindergarten model that would provide a smooth transition into first grade and provide a foundation for the teaching and learning theory of the Four Blocks Model. Realizing the developmental differences of kindergarten children, Dr. Cunningham, Dr. Dorothy Hall, and Elaine Williams designed a model which they called Building Blocks for the kindergarten classroom. The Building Blocks framework revolves around several concepts of emergent literacy development. (Sigmon, 1998)

To build this strong foundation, activities need to multileveled and developmentally appropriate. "A multilevel activity is one where there are multiple things to be learned and multiple ways for children, no matter what their current stage of development, to move forward. (Hall & Cunningham, 1997)

"The goal of a developmentally appropriate kindergarten is to accept all children where they are and take them forward on their literacy journey. Developmentally appropriate, means the curriculum is carefully framed on the knowledge of children's physical, social, and intellectual growth. It is based on what children need to learn and what is known about how children learn." (Hall

& Cunningham, 1997)

"A developmentally appropriate kindergarten is like a good home, where children can learn through playing, cooking, watching, listening, acting, reading or pretend reading, and writing or pretend writing. It is a place where they can explore their environment, ask questions, and answer questions. It is a place where the teacher is like a parent – reading to the children and talking about the stories they read; writing for children and allowing them to write for different purposes; having time to explore their community on field trips; and talking about those experiences together. It is a place where children clean up after themselves, learn more about familiar and unfamiliar topics (usually called themes,), and learn more about what interests them most – themselves. Most importantly, it is a place where children learn that reading provides both enjoyment and information, and they develop the desire to learn to read and write." (Hall & Cunningham, 1997)

"Building Blocks integrates Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words, with the themes and units that are part of every kindergarten day. The blocks don't have a set time slot – and certainly don't get 30-40 minutes every day. Building Blocks is a kindergarten framework that is consistent with how kindergarten teachers teach and how they structure their days." (Hall & Williams, 2000)

CHAPTER III

DATA COLLECTION

Participants

The participants selected for my action research project were the students in my morning and afternoon classes at Ben Franklin Elementary School. The total number of students included in my project was 37, consisting of 24 boys and 13 girls. 14 students belonged to the ESOL program.

The participants selected for the control group of my action research project were the students in my team member's morning and afternoon kindergarten classes at Ben Franklin Elementary School. I chose her classes because our classroom populations were similar. The total number of her students was 33, consisting of 19 boys and 14 girls. 11 students belonged to the ESOL program.

Procedure

During the third week of the 2001-2002 school year, the Rochester School District's Literacy Assessment was administered to all kindergarten students. After viewing the results of my students' scores, I knew that I needed to try something different to teach reading readiness for the upcoming year. The concepts that were covered on this new assessment did not match what our current reading curriculum covered.

I referred to two books that I had read over the summer. The two books were The Teacher's Guide to Building Blocks, and Month-By Month Reading and Writing For Kindergarten. I was impressed with the philosophy these books presented because it balanced reading and writing techniques in a developmentally appropriate way. It fit very well in a kindergarten classroom.

Throughout the school year I proceeded with many of the teaching techniques that Building Blocks suggested to use. The following are the tools and activities I utilized throughout the school to implement Building Blocks into my classroom.

The first thing I did was to set up classroom library. I provided a wide range of books which included fiction, non-fiction, and leveled books. It was very important that the children were exposed to a variety of literature.

Next, I focused on restructuring shared reading time in my classroom. I had always used predictable big books during shared reading and planned follow up lessons that focused on comprehension. Building Blocks suggested that I should focus on activities before reading, during reading, and after reading. **Before reading activities** build upon background knowledge and get the children ready to read the book by discussing experiences related to the book. **During reading activities** are done after the students have heard the story at least once. We then reread the story by methods such as shared, choral, or echo reading. **After reading activities** refer to when I concentrated on the understanding and comprehension of the story through discussion, asking of questions, acting out the story, retellings, or focusing on print concepts and/or reading readiness skills.

Building Blocks encourages children to read independently. One way to support this was by having leveled books accessible to my students. These leveled books are books that they have already read during their individual reading time with me. I also provided many opportunities for independent reading in all the centers in my classroom. In the Math center I provided books that explained math concepts like counting, telling time, counting money, etc. In the Science center I provided books about animals, plants, space, etc. I also made a center called "Read the Room." Children used a pointer and traveled throughout the classroom reading words in the room such as posters, charts, books, labels, color words, numbers, etc.

Building Blocks also provided many ideas for teaching guided, shared, and independent writing. Each day I wrote a message with the children. Together my students and I would brainstorm topics to write about. We would pick a topic and write a main idea followed by detail sentences. As I wrote, I explained everything I wrote and why I wrote it. After the paragraph was written, I would call on students to practice a variety of print concepts and reading readiness skills such as count the sentences, count the words, find a word that starts the same way as _____, find a word that rhymes with ______, etc.

One of my favorite pre-writing activities were predictable charts. These charts provided my students with print concept skills needed for both reading and writing. On the first two days, my students were given a model of a sentence to follow. The children than dictated their sentence to me as I wrote it down on chart paper. After the dictation was taken the student then read the sentence back as he/she pointed to each word.

On the third day after all the children dictated a sentence, the students touch read their own sentence. Touch reading enables the child to learn how to track print.

On the fourth day, I focused on the sentence, the words, the letters and their sounds. Prior to the lesson, I wrote three to four of the students' sentences on sentence strips, cut the words apart, and put them in an envelope. Then, I passed out one word to as many children as there were words. This group of children became "sentence builders". They came up to the front of the group area and worked together to put the words in the correct order so their sentence made sense. As my students got used to this process, I began to ask more thought provoking questions about the sentences.

On the fifth and last day, the children were given an envelope with the words to their own sentence cut apart. Their job was to build their sentence into the correct order and glue it down on the bottom of a piece of paper. Next, they illustrated their sentence on the top of the page. Finally, all the pages were compiled into a class book that quickly became a favorite to read during independent reading time.

Journals were another tool I used to encourage independent writing. I started journals in January because the students had watched me write on many occasions and they had a good idea of what was expected of them. This daily writing activity allowed my children the opportunity to use their knowledge of letters, sounds, and words to write what they wanted to say by saying words and slowly sounding them out.

"Special Student Of The Day" was an activity that took place the first few weeks of school. Every day a different student was picked to be the special student of the day. First, the special student (let's say his name is Joe) would dictate a sentence that we added to our predictable class chart, My name is ________. We compared Joe's name with other names that were on the chart and discussed letters, words, and patterns that we noticed on the chart. Next, we filled out a "Getting To Know You" poster that asked Joe certain questions. While I wrote down Joe's answers I explained what I was writing. Then, we explored the letters in Joe's name. We counted the how many letters were in his name, and we added his name to the word wall. Next, Joe received three cards with each letter of his name on them. He selected three of his friends to hold each letter. Next, Joe had to put his friends who were holding the individual letters of his name in the correct order. Then, we gave a cheer… "Give me a J. Give me an o. Give me an e. What does it spell? Joe!" After our cheer, every student received a piece of paper and together we wrote the letters of Joe's name and illustrated a picture of Joe. Finally, all the pictures were compiled into a booklet that Joe got to take home. Joe's picture stayed at school and we added it to our bulletin board of special students.

Most students want to learn about how to read and write interesting words that are meaningful to them. Copying words from a chart or poster is usually the first step towards independent writing. I provided a blank booklet for each student and displayed a poster of labeled pictures that corresponded with a theme or the current month. Each time the children visited that center, they found their book, copied the word, and than illustrated the picture. By the end of each month, every child had a monthly dictionary that they could take home and read.

The Building Blocks philosophy advised that each student needed a strong foundation of phonemic awareness. I taught many lessons that focused on these skills. Many of my lessons included nursery rhymes, rhyming books, playing games with words that start alike, tongue twisters, clapping syllables, and isolating sounds. I also found many other resource books that were filled with silly games with words.

Data Collection Tools

In September 2001 the Rochester School District came out with a new way to evaluate kindergarten student's reading readiness skills. They developed what is known as the Rochester Kindergarten Literacy Assessment. This is the tool I used to collect my data.

This assessment focused on reading and language skills consisting of 160 possible points. It began by testing a student's ability to recognize upper and lower case letters as well their sounds. The next section of the test concentrated on a student's knowledge about print concept skills by asking a series of questions about a book. The section after that determined if children were familiar with rhyming words. Segmenting sentences and words was the next skill tested, followed by seeing if the student could isolate initial, final, and medial sounds of words.

Data Collection

During the third week of September 2001, all the kindergarten students at Ben Franklin were given the Rochester Kindergarten Literacy Assessment. Their score gave me a baseline of their reading readiness skills.

In May of 2002 the same kindergarten students were given the same Rochester Kindergarten Literacy Assessment in order to gather data to see how much the students improved on their reading readiness skills throughout the school year.

My data analysis was a comparison of the scores from the first and second Rochester Kindergarten Literacy Assessment tests.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Process

After all the kindergarten students took the assessment in September, I recorded all the scores and averaged the scores of my class as well as the control group. This provided me with a baseline of the students' reading readiness data.

After administering the same assessment in May, I recorded the students' scores in the same manner as I did in the fall

In order to see the amount of academic growth made by each group I took each individual student's spring score and subtracted it from their fall score. From there, I averaged each group's amount of academic growth score.

Results

The baseline average for my group was 49.7 points. The control group's baseline average was 53.8.

The average of the spring results for my group was 126.2points. The control group was 119.8.

The average amount of growth my group made was 76.4 points. The control's group average amount of growth was 66.03 points.

The results of my action plan show that Building Blocks was an effective way to teach a balanced literacy program. The most significant positive discrepancy between scores was comparing the average amount of growth each group made throughout the school year. There was a positive result of 10.37 points. (Appendix B) I was very encouraged by those results.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION/ACTION PLAN

I was very pleased with the results of my study. Throughout the school year I was very impressed with the knowledge my students acquired from the Building Block's activities. The children left my room with a positive attitude toward school and learning. They saw themselves as readers and writers throughout the entire school year. I feel that Building Blocks has given my kindergarten students a foundation of basic literacy skills that will make their transition to first grade a successful one.

I was very pleased with my student's writing abilities throughout the school year. It motivated me so much, that I continued to learn more about teaching writing to children by taking a class this summer called "Unleashing Young Writers." I gained so much from this class and I am very excited to add many of these ideas to enhance the Building Blocks curriculum that I will continue to use in my everyday instruction of reading and writing.

REFERENCES

Hall, D. P., & Cunningham, P.M. (1997). *Month by month reading and writing for kindergarten systematic, multilevel instruction.* Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Co., Inc.

Hall, D.P., & Williams, E. (2000*). The teacher's guide to building blocks.* Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Co., Inc.

Sigmon, C.M. (1998). *Kindergarten: building blocks, not four blocks.* Reading Matters (Spring 1998): http://teachers.net/net/4blocks/article16.html

APPENDIX A
ROCHESTER KINDERGARTEN LITERACY ASSESSMENT

Rochester Kindergarten Literacy Assessment

Align top of label with arrows.

Place bar-code label here.

Name ____________________

Teacher Sample

School ____________________

Date Completed ____________________

ROCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Marking Instructions

Please Note!

If there is not a bar-code label, please–
Write in the information in the appropriate area above.
•Bubble in the 7-digit Student ID.

- **Use a No. 2 pencil only.**
- **Do not use ink, ballpoint, or felt tip pens.**
- **Make solid marks that fill the response completely.**

CORRECT: ● **INCORRECT:** ⊘☒◒◔

Student ID

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
⓪	⓪	⓪	⓪	⓪	⓪	⓪
①	①	①	①	①	①	①
②	②	②	②	②	②	②
③	③	③	③	③	③	③
④	④	④	④	④	④	④
⑤	⑤	⑤	⑤	⑤	⑤	⑤
⑥	⑥	⑥	⑥	⑥	⑥	⑥
⑦	⑦	⑦	⑦	⑦	⑦	⑦
⑧	⑧	⑧	⑧	⑧	⑧	⑧
⑨	⑨	⑨	⑨	⑨	⑨	⑨

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Section One: [illegible] 53 points

Upper case letters 26 points

Say: *"Please tell me the name of each upper case letter as I point to it. If you are not sure, you may take a guess or tell me you don't know."* (Darken in the bubble beside each correct response or darken the "Knows all upper case letters" bubble when appropriate.)

O ○ X ○ A ○ C ○ T ○ B ○ L ○ R ○ I ○

S ○ P ○ G ○ N ○ Q ○ F ○ H ○ E ○ D ○

M ○ K ○ Z ○ J ○ Y ○ W ○ U ○ V ○

Knows all upper case letters ○

Lower case letters 26 points

Say: *"Please tell me the name of each lower case letter as I point to it. If you are not sure, you may take a guess or tell me you don't know."* (Darken in the bubble beside each correct response or darken the "Knows all lower case letters" bubble when appropriate.)

o ○ x ○ a ○ c ○ t ○ b ○ l ○ r ○ i ○

s ○ p ○ g ○ n ○ q ○ f ○ h ○ e ○ d ○

m ○ k ○ z ○ j ○ y ○ w ○ u ○ v ○

Knows all lower case letters ○

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Sounds of letters

20 points

Say: *"Now as I point to each letter, please tell me the sound it makes. If you are not sure you may take a guess or say you don't know."* (Accept both hard or soft consonants. Darken in the bubble beside each correct response or darken the "Says all letter sounds" bubble when appropriate.")

b ○ **c** ○ **d** **g** ○ **h** ○ **j** ○

k ○ **l** ○ **m** ○ **n** ○ **p** ○ **q** ○ **r** ○

s ○ **t** ○ **v** ○ **w** ○ **y** ○ **z** ○

Says all letter sounds ○

Concepts About Print (CAP)

10 points

Introduction

Say: *"I'm going to read you this story, and I want you to help me."*

Cover

Item 1 **Test: Front of book** ① ⓪

(Pass the booklet to the child, holding the book vertically by outside edge, spine towards the child.)

Say: *"Show me the front of this book."*

Page 1

Say: *"I'm going to read the first page of this story to you. Please point to each word as I read."* (Teacher will observe student's response to items 1,2 and 3 as he/she reads the first page.

Test: Directional rules

Item 2 **Which way do I go? (left to right)** ① ⓪

Item 3 **Return sweep to left** ① ⓪

Item 4 **Word by word matching** ① ⓪

Page 3/4

Item 5 **Test: Left page is read before right page** ① ⓪

Say: *"Where do I start reading?"*
Teacher reads pages 3 and 4

Test: Punctuation

Item 6 **Meaning of period** ① ⓪

Say: *"What's this for?"*
Point to or trace the period with a pencil. (Accept 'Period,' 'Stop,' or 'The end.')

Item 7 **Meaning of question mark** ① ⓪

Say: *"What's this for?"*
Point to or trace the question mark with a pencil. (Accept 'Question mark,' 'A question' or 'Asks something.')

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Page 5 Teacher reads page 5.

Page 6

Teacher reads page 6.
(Have two 3x5 cards that the child can hold and slide easily over the line of text to block out words and letters. To start, lay the cards on the page leaving all of the print exposed. Open the cards out between each question asked.)

Test: Letter/word concepts

Item 8 **One letter: two letters** ① ⓪

Say: *"I want you to push the cards across the sentence like this until all you can see is one letter."*
(Slide the cards across the print. Demonstrate the movement with the cards but do not do the exercise.)
"Now show me two letters."

Item 9 **One word: two words** ① ⓪

Say: *"Show me just one word."*
"Now show me two words."

Item 10 **Capital letter** ① ⓪

Say: *"Show me a capital or upper case letter."*

Writes first name 1 point

Writes name: Ⓨ Ⓝ
(Accept all responses including all capitals, reversals, etc., as long as it is consistently reproduced.)

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Section Two: [illegible] 30 points

Phonological Awareness Test*

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Rhyming

Discrimination 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say two words and ask you if they rhyme. Listen carefully. Do these words rhyme?* fan ◆ man (yes) dog ◆ door (no) *The words have to sound alike at the end."*

Stimulus: *"Do these words rhyme? ________ ◆ ________"*

Item	Response	Score		Item	Response	Score	
1. book ◆ look	yes	①	⓪	6. mop ◆ hop	yes	①	⓪
2. ring ◆ rat	no	①	⓪	7. shoe ◆ fan	no	①	⓪
3. box ◆ mess	no	①	⓪	8. sweater ◆ better	yes	①	⓪
4. fun ◆ run	yes	①	⓪	9. camper ◆ hamper	yes	①	⓪
5. fish ◆ dish	yes	①	⓪	10. pudding ◆ table	no	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble and go to Rhyming Production.**

Production 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say a word and I want you to tell me a word that rhymes with it. You can make up a word if you want to. Tell me a word that rhymes with bat."* (rat, hat, sat, lat, etc.)

Note: Please record all responses. Nonsense rhyming words are acceptable.

Stimulus: *"Tell me a word that rhymes with ________."*

Item	Child's Response	Score		Item	Child's Response	Score	
1. can	________	①	⓪	6. kite	________	①	⓪
2. pot	________	①	⓪	7. bee	________	①	⓪
3. wrinkle	________	①	⓪	8. paper	________	①	⓪
4. brother	________	①	⓪	9. shower	________	①	⓪
5. bark	________	①	⓪	10. monkey	________	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble and go to Segmentation.**

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Segmentation

Sentences — 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say a sentence, and I want you to clap one time for each word I say. My house is big. Now, clap it with me."* Say the sentence again and clap once as you say each word. *"My - house - is - big. Now, you try it by yourself. My house is big."* (4 claps)

Stimulus: *"Clap one time for each word I say. ____________________"*

Item	Response	Score		Item	Response	Score	
1. He can swim.	3 claps	①	⓪	6. Some cows give milk.	4 claps	①	⓪
2. My cat is black.	4 claps	①	⓪	7. The clown has big feet.	5 claps	①	⓪
3. I am very tall.	4 claps	①	⓪	8. Let's go to school.	4 claps	①	⓪
4. My dad's car won't start.	5 claps	①	⓪	9. I have ten books.	4 claps	①	⓪
5. That flower is pretty.	4 claps	①	⓪	10. The kite is flying high.	5 claps	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble and go to Syllables.**

Syllables — 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say a word, and I want you to clap one time for each word part or syllable I say. Saturday. Now, clap it with me."* Say the word again and clap once as you say each word part. *"Sat - ur - day. Now you try it by yourself. Saturday.* (3 claps) *Now listen to this word. Go. Now clap it with me. Go.* (1 clap)."

Stimulus: *"Clap one time for each word part ____________________."*

Item	Response	Score		Item	Response	Score	
1. pizza	2 claps	①	⓪	6. moose	1 clap	①	⓪
2. watermelon	4 claps	①	⓪	7. elephant	3 claps	①	⓪
3. fix	1 clap	①	⓪	8. pillow	2 claps	①	⓪
4. calendar	3 claps	①	⓪	9. kindergarten	4 claps	①	⓪
5. television	4 claps	①	⓪	10. candy	2 claps	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble and go to Phonemes.**

Phonemes — 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say a word, and then I'll say each sound in the word. cat.* Say the individual sounds, pausing slightly between each one. */c - a - t/ "Now you try it by yourself. Listen carefully. black /b - l - a - ck/ Now you try it by yourself."*

Stimulus: *"Tell me each sound in ______________."*

Item	Response	Score		Item	Response	Score	
1. fat	f - a - t/	①	⓪	6. plop	/p - l - o - p/	①	⓪
2. rock	/r - o - k/	①	⓪	7. liver	/l - i - v - ėr/	①	⓪
3. me	/m - ē /	①	⓪	8. eyebrow	/ī - b - r - ou/	①	⓪
4. off	/ö - f /	①	⓪	9. seashell	/s - ē - sh - e - l/	①	⓪
5. brag	/b - r - a - g/	①	⓪	10. plant	/p - l - a - n - t/	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble and go to Isolation.**

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Isolation

Initial 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say a word, and I want you to tell me the beginning or first sound in the word. What's the beginning sound in the word* *cat?"* / k /

Stimulus: *"What's the beginning sound in the word ___________?"*

Item	Response	Score		Item	Response	Score	
1. bite	/ b /	①	⓪	6. apple	/ a /	①	⓪
2. toy	/ t /	①	⓪	7. garage	/ g /	①	⓪
3. dinosaur	/ d /	①	⓪	8. happy	/ h /	①	⓪
4. fudge	/ f /	①	⓪	9. chalk	/ ch /	①	⓪
5. nose	/ n /	①	⓪	10. laugh	/ l /	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble and go to Final.**

Final 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say a word, and I want you to tell me the ending or last sound in the word. What's the ending sound in the word* *cat?"* /t/

Stimulus: *"What's the ending sound in the word ____________?"*

Item	Response	Score		Item	Response	Score	
1. bug	/ g /	①	⓪	6. wish	/ sh /	①	⓪
2. rat	/ t /	①	⓪	7. bear	/ r /	①	⓪
3. math	/ th /	①	⓪	8. plum	/ m /	①	⓪
4. pitch	/ ch /	①	⓪	9. cute	/ t /	①	⓪
5. tub	/ b /	①	⓪	10. please	/ z /	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble and go to Medial.**

Medial 10 points

Say: *"I'm going to say a word, and I want you to tell me the middle sound in the word. What's the middle sound in the word* *cat?"* / a /

Stimulus: *"What's the middle sound in the word __________?"*

Item	Response	Score		Item	Response	Score	
1. cup	/ u /	①	⓪	6. pod	/ o /	①	⓪
2. mouse	/ ou /	①	⓪	7. sky	/ k /	①	⓪
3. and	/ n /	①	⓪	8. bait	/ā/	①	⓪
4. coin	/ oi /	①	⓪	9. moon	/ū/	①	⓪
5. gas	/ a /	①	⓪	10. cone	/ō/	①	⓪

STOP Ⓢ **If student misses first five items, please fill in the "S" bubble.**

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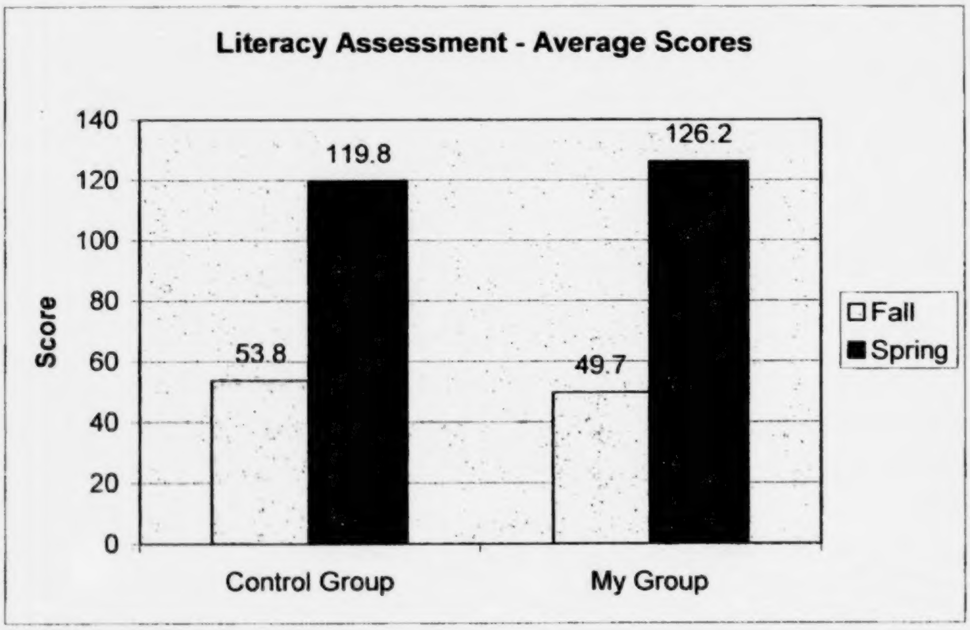
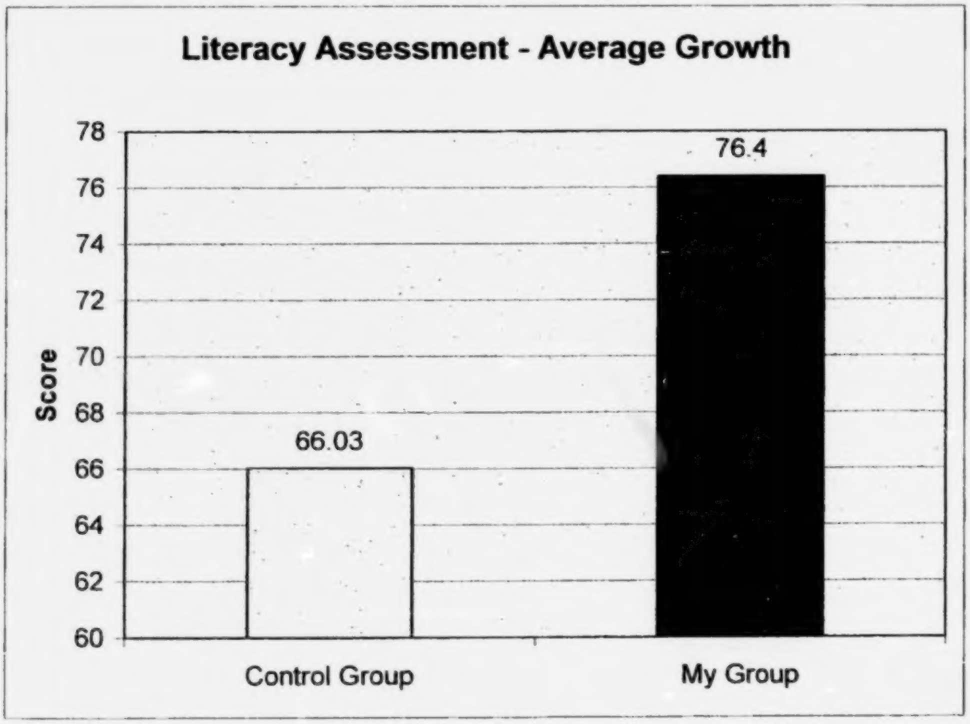
APPENDIX B
LITERACY ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS





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LITERATURE CIRCLES

By

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A thesis submitted to the
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This thesis entitled:
Literature Circles
Written by Colleen Hansen Egle
Has been approved for the Department of Education

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the
Signatories, and we find that both the content and the form
meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work
In the above mentioned discipline.

Margaret

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Margaret Lundquist

Egle, Colleen Hansen (Masters of Education) Abstract

Literature Circles

Thesis directed by Margaret Lundquist

Students have a noticeable inability to hold a discussion in general, let alone about a piece of literature. This problem stems from several factors including: developmental ability, lack of prior experience, the lack of background knowledge, and the lack of models.

To address this curricular concern, I investigated how to use literature circles in my classroom. The main resource that I used was Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups by Harvey Daniels. The book carefully outlined the steps to take when setting-up literature circles, assessment of the activities, and pit-falls of literature circles.

The research focused on the effectiveness of literature circles in comparison to whole class discussion and other 'traditional' discussion formats. The results found that literature circles are an effective way to increase student discussion.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I wanted to see if students were instructed in how to have a discussion, if they then could reproduce this information independently in a small group setting. I needed to pre-teach students on the different parts of discussion. The first step was to explain to students how one should work in a group. Explaining what a good group looks like and acts like was necessary. The next step was to help students feel safe and secure in my classroom. This was accomplished through community building activities. Then students had an opportunity to share their thoughts with one other person of their choosing. This allowed the students to interact in a safe and secure environment. Introducing students to Bloom's Taxonomy helped them to gain knowledge about the different levels of questioning and thinking. Finally, role sheets were given to students. The role sheet helped we students to define a specific role they played in the discussion. Through this process, students gained needed background information about literature circles and thus were able to hold a productive and meaningful conversation about a piece of literature.

Need for the Study

The reason I became interested in literature circles was that I noticed that students do not know how to have a discussion in general, let alone about a piece of literature. While attending a middle school convention, I attended a workshop about literature circles. I was struck by how easy this method would be to use and teach to my students. After attending the workshop, I started to investigate literature circles and how to implement them in my classroom.

Statement of Problem

Students have a noticeable inability to have a discussion about literature. The problem stems from several factors including: developmental ability, lack of prior experience, the lack of background knowledge, and the lack of models.

Statement of Question

Will instruction on how to conduct a literature circle improve a student's ability to discuss literature in a small group setting?

Terms **Literature Circle** – similar to a book club. A small setting in which students discuss a piece of literature.

Bloom's Taxonomy -- a classification of thinking and questioning.

Role Sheets – a job each student is expected to perform during the literature discussion. The sheet is the write-up of the student's job.

Limitations of the Study

There were several independent variables to this study. One limitation to the study was that it didn't take into consideration if a student was a natural conversationalist. If a student was an oratory learner, the study did not note this. Although, this type of student may still increase the number of times s/he responds in a discussion because they have learned how to discuss even more than s/he currently does. Another limitation was that the study did not completely take into consideration the make-up of the groups. Some students may do a better job of discussing, depending on who was in their group. Another variable in the study was the actual methods in which to teach students about literature circles.

Dependent variables fell into three areas. A videotape documented a series of discussions and showed the growth in discussion abilities of the students. The next variable involved tallying how many times students responded during a whole class discussion. Finally, student surveys showed student thoughts about the process of literature circles. The final limitation involved the control variables. The study was done in the same school, Friedell Middle School, with the same aged students, 12-14 year olds, and in the same course, English 7.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of literature circles has been around for many years but was reintroduced and reworked in the 1980's. Literature circles later gained popularity in the 1990's with the increased popularity of adult book clubs. This occurred when teachers started to bring the adult book club concepts into their classrooms.

The experts in literature circles have defined circles as:

> Small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group-determined portion of the text, each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with the notes needed to help perform that job (Daniels 2).

Over years of development, literature circles have become an accepted form of teaching reading comprehension. Literature circles are also firmly rooted in reader response theory. Reader response is a reading approach influenced by the work of Louise Rosenblatt. In reader response theory, the reader is central to the process of assigning meaning to the text, not the teacher. Rosenblatt describes response to literature "as not answering a series of questions or attending to a collection of details, but as a transaction between the reader and the text" (Spiegel 42). Rosenblatt also insists that there is not just one interpretation of a text but multiples, "each of them profoundly dependent on the prior experience brought to the text by each reader" (Daniels 37). Because the reader and his/her experiences are an integral part of reading comprehension, the use of literature circles helps the student and teacher develop and mature this process of comprehension. The premise of literature circles is for the student to talk about what s/he knows and thinks about a piece of literature.

How does the use of literature circles address the need to have the reader develop his/her own interpretations of text? The book, Book Talk and Beyond, explains this connection in the following way: "language is fundamental to thinking and through classroom talk, students come to experience the social and collaborative nature of literacy" (Roser 67). Evelyn Hanssen states this same idea in the context of helping to create literate behaviors in students. "We want our students to be able to explore and talk about literature in the way that literate people do" (Hanssen 207). The nature of literature circles helps students move toward this ultimate goal of literacy. Jeni Day adds to this belief that discussion is a necessity to interpretation and understanding. She notes in her book Moving Forward with Literature Circles, that discussion helps strong readers to gain control over comprehension by having to explain their ideas to a group of peers. This discussion also helps weak readers see and understand good comprehension skills in practice (Day 18).

The use of literature circles has also been endorsed because of its ability to teach comprehension in a different and effective way. In fact, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association's standards endorse literature circles as one of the "best classroom practices" in the teaching of reading and writing (Daniels 7).

In Moving Forward with Literature Circles, Day points out that reading comprehension is often mistaught. She goes on to explain that while teachers talk about reading comprehension, they often do not actually teach the skill, but instead, test the student's ability to complete a reading comprehension activity (Day 18). Literature circles help to end this problem by teaching the five facets of comprehension: remembering literary elements, appreciating literary devices, noticing connections across texts, making text connections, making personal connections, and evaluating the text (Day 19). Literature circles put comprehension into practice, and the initial use of role sheets, helps the student to gain the previously stated comprehension skills. Furthermore, literature discussions help to increase student interest in reading, while decreasing the domination of teacher talk. Finally, the teacher must remember that the lack of student involvement in classroom talk causes students to have "little opportunity to raise topics of interest, pursue lines of thinking, or collaborate in critical problem solving-a situation even more pronounced for poor readers" (Roser 67).

Literature circles also help low-level readers in several ways. To begin with, literature circles are a collaborative effort, which means that creating meaning is completed in a group setting and not individually. Research indicates that children are capable of responding to literature far beyond their reading ability (Roser 114). This means that it is likely for low-level readers to benefit from small group discussion. Day also states, "It is critical for second-language learners to learn the conversational practices of the mainstream community. . .during literature circles, these students can see modeled the types of processes that they can use to make books meaningful" (Day 134). Katherine Noe echoes this belief by stating, "The power of working together to make meaning cannot be underestimated for challenged readers, whether their challenges are related to language, learning or motivation" (Brown 4).

The experts in the field of reading endorse the use of literature circles as a viable method of teaching discussion, comprehension and thinking. Their enthusiasm for literature circles affirms the use of the activity in the any Language Arts classroom. In this day and age of testing mandates, it is imperative for teachers to be armed with research to back-up his/her use of literature circle activities in the classroom and literature circles have been proven to be an excellent tool for improving student performance in reading comprehension.

CHAPTER III

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Participants

The participants of this study included four sections of English 7 students. On the average, each class consisted of 27 students ranging in age from twelve to fourteen years. Classes met for approximately 50 minutes every day for the school year. Students had the reading range of 4.2 to post high school and IQ ranges from 90-150. Classes were equally divided in terms of gender, socioeconomic background and ethnic background.

Data Collection Tools

Four data collection tools were used. First students were surveyed after literature circles. Students were asked to answer the survey questions in a complete manner, giving specifics where appropriate. The second form of collection was teacher observation. The teacher assessed students on their discussion by direct observation and interaction with the literature circle participants. Students were assessed on their ability to stay engaged in the discussion, expand on the given discussion topic, and stay on task. The next form of collection included a series of videotaped literature circles. The tapes showed the growth of student discussion during a school year. The final tool used was the tallying of student responses during a whole class discussion. This process was used as a comparison tool to compare the number of responses given during whole class discussion verses a literature circle.

Data Collection

Data was collected throughout the second semester of the school year. All classes were surveyed, observed by the teacher, and participated in the whole class discussions. Student responses to survey questions did not influence his/her over-all grade. The survey information was used as a way to improve literature circles and as a way to survey attitudes about the activity. The only group videotaped were the students from 5th hour. This group was chosen because they were the most talkative of the sections and appeared they would not be intimidated by a video camera taping their discussions.

Procedure

The procedure used to conduct this action research was multi-stepped and took on several forms. The nature of literature circles asks students to share their thoughts and feelings about a text passage, but before students can effectively and successfully take this step, they must feel secure with their classmates. In order to prepare students for an actual literature circle, they were first exposed to less intimidating activities. These introductory activities took place over most of first semester, with the more formal literature circles taking place during second semester.

The introductory activities used in the classroom included community building, pair reading, and reaction activities. The first activity involved community building as a way of exposing students to one another. During the activities, students were asked to interact with one another while completing fun and engaging activities. These activities allowed students to become familiar and comfortable with each other.

Next students participated in pair reading. Pair reading involved students pairing up with each other and reading aloud a piece of literature. Because students read aloud together, they naturally stopped and talked about interesting, funny or confusing passages. During the activity of pair reading, students conducted an informal version of literature circles without being aware of it. The final group of introductory activities involved reaction activities. Such interactions included journaling and observations made while reading; in turn, these thoughts were shared in whole class or small group discussions. For example, after reading the novel The Outsiders, students were asked to write down ten events, questions, or reactions they had to the book. The students then formed groups and shared their reactions to the book. All of these introductory activities helped prepare students for literature circles.

The next set of classroom activities involved students learning about group dynamics. To begin with, students read a passage from the source book Write Source 2000, which covered information about how a good group works. For example, students learned how to handle disagreements or conflicts that may arise during group work. As students took turns reading, the teacher helped the students take notes on the material. After the material was covered, a short discussion about the information was held. Next, students learned the difference between discussion questions and knowledge or recall questions; sometimes these are referred to as thick or thin questions. Students were asked to identify discussion questions verses recall questions. Finally, students practiced this process of creating discussion questions. The above process is one of the most important pre-literature circle activities students engaged in because it taught the basic skills of how people work together and hold conversations.

After students were comfortable with one another and had basic group dynamic information, they were ready to learn about literature circles. A basic description of literature circles was given to students. Once students understood what a literature circle was, they were given information about role sheets (Appendix A). The roles came in many forms but the roles used in this project included: Discussion Director, Literary Luminary, Illustrator, Word Wizard, Character Connection, Summarizer, Travel Tracer, Investigator, and Connector. The role sheets acted as a guide for the students to follow and include in the discussion. Having students complete different jobs helped the discussion to include the many different aspects of a text.

After students were exposed to the roles, they were then given the opportunity to practice a literature circle. The teacher assigned the members to the first discussion group. To help the groups function more smoothly, the teacher also picked the first Discussion Director. The Discussion Director was unofficially in charge of the group and responsible for coming up with the main discussion questions. For the first discussion it was important for the class to see what a good discussion question looks like, so that students could really grasp how important good questions were to the success of the conversation. After being assigned to a group, students picked from a number of roles and completed their job sheet for the first discussion to be held the following day. During the discussions, the teacher moved from each group to observe and assess group members. Finally, students were asked to complete a survey about the activity.

As the literature circles progressed, more control was given over to the students. For example, literature circles moved from all students reading the same text, to students picking which story they wanted to read out of a list of choices. Students also picked what role they would take for the discussion. Sometimes they picked the roles they wanted to use in the discussion. Students decided how many pages to read each night when completing a novel unit. Students also decided when the group needed to meet to work on role sheets or a group project.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Process

Data was collected in four different formats: survey, teacher observation, videotape, and whole class discussion. The different formats compared different aspects of literature circles, and the formats provided extra insight for the teacher on how to improve the circles.

The surveys provided insight into students' over-all reaction to the classroom activity. The surveys showed the students' attitudes about literature circles-whether they liked or disliked the activity and if the activity was useful. Students were surveyed several times throughout the second semester of the school year. Comparing the responses to the surveys was difficult. The main issue that arose was that some survey questions were worded in such a way that multiple responses could be given. The surveys were worded in this way so that students could pinpoint positives or negatives that arose during discussions. The teacher shared the most common responses with all classes following discussions. To help in the comparison of responses, the answers were put into categories depending on the nature of the answer.

Students were surveyed four times. The first literature circle activities were completed while students were reading one of two books, Julie of the Wolves or The Call of the Wild. For the first literature circles, students were placed in teacher chosen groups. After completing the discussions, two discussions were held for each book and students were surveyed. One of the biases present in the first discussion was that most students had never been in a literature discussion, so many students did not feel like they were comfortable or understood what to do. By the time the second discussion of the book took place, students felt more comfortable with the activity and their role in the discussion, thus their attitudes were more positive.

The next time students completed a literature circle, the circumstances changed. To begin with, students read a myth about Hercules rather than reading a book. The next difference was that students were allowed to pick their own groups for the discussion. The teacher still picked what roles would be present during the conversations, but the students picked what role they wanted. The bias present in this survey was that students were swayed to be more positive about the activity because they were given more control over group choice. Their positive responses did not necessarily have to do with the actual quality of discussion.

The final set of discussions took place during a unit about the Middle Ages. During this unit, students had the most control. Students picked what book they wanted to read, and from this choice, students formed their literature circles. Students decided how many pages to read each night and what roles would be used during the discussion. Students also decided when they would meet to work on activities for the book, discussion or group projects. The survey questions asked students to rate their discussions on a 1-10 scale and to reflect on the effectiveness of the activity. This survey showed the least amount of bias because students had become comfortable with the discussions, and they gave the most honest answers.

The next form of data collection was teacher observation. The teacher used observation as a way of assessing students on completing and participating in literature circles. Teacher observation took place every time a literature circle was held. The teacher moved from group to group and listened in the conversations. Sometimes the group poised a question to the teacher that no one else in the group could answer. Most times the teacher did not take part in the conversation unless the group was at a standstill or if important information needed to be shared with the group.

During the observations, the teacher rated students on a scale of zero to 20. The teacher rated students on their ability to expand and add to the conversation, stay on task, listen and not interrupt, and encourage others to add to the conversation. Students usually lost points because of being off-task or being overly quiet or disengaged. Some of the off-task behavior included holding side conversations, completing role sheets during the discussion, goofing around with others, or bothering other groups. Students kept points for being active in the conversation, encouraging others to share, adding and expanding the discussion. The main source of bias during the teacher observation was that the teacher was not present during the entire conversation, so it was possible that a student who was not participating earlier may have participated after the teacher left.

The third form of collection involved videotaping one class period's discussions. The teacher pre-selected five students to follow throughout the semester; the students selected had different reading levels and different comfort levels with speaking in groups. The main bias of the tape was that some students clammed up in front of the camera, and they did not interact naturally with one another. The discussion may have been better had the camera not been present.

The final data collection involved using a control of sorts. The last tool investigated how many students actually participated when a whole class discussion was held. During this activity, the stories discussed were short stories that had been read in class; this ensured that everyone knew the literature being discussed. The teacher led the discussion by asking open-ended questions and then tallying when a student responded. A student raising his/her hand to contribute to the conversation defined a response. The most obvious bias to this data was that some students found some stories more interesting than others; therefore, some classes had more responses to certain stories than others. Another bias was that some classes had a tendency to be more talkative than others, so percentages of participation may have been skewed.

Results

In order to see what the results mean each data collection tool had to be looked at individually. Put together, all the tools affirmed the question, "Will instruction on how to conduct a literature circle improve a student's ability to discuss literature in a small group setting?" The very nature of literature circles asks for 100% participation at some point in the discussion, and for this reason, the research about literature circles reaffirmed that it is a positive and effective instruction tool. The following results will explain this conclusion.

To begin with, looking at student attitude about the activity was insightful (Appendix B). After holding the very first literature circle, students were asked a series of four questions looking into their attitude about literature circles. The results over-all were quite encouraging. As a reminder, for the first two discussions students were put into teacher-selected groups. In response to the first question- "How did your discussion go?" 85% of the students said it went well. When asked if they liked the activity, 74% said yes, with 21% responding no. The most encouraging response was to the question- "Do you feel this activity helped you talk more about books?" 82% of the students felt that it did. This positive answer really helped to reaffirm that literature circles accomplished what they were designed to do- -get kids talking about books. During the second discussion, students stayed in the same groups as the first discussion, and this time students discussed the second half of the book. When students were asked how the discussion went that time, 99% responded that it was a good conversation. Seventy percent of the students felt that this discussion went better than the first one; with 11% feeling it stayed about the same.

During the third discussion, students were allowed to pick their own groups. After reading a myth about the twelve tasks of Hercules, students held their discussion and again they were surveyed. This time when students were asked if the discussion went better than their last circle, 68% felt it went better and 32% felt it was worse. Some students were very insightful as to why this may have taken place. Several students noted that they did not work well with their friends, and some found their friends to be distracting. Others noted that working with friends was great, but at the same time, they didn't hear as many different points of view. Over all, students felt that the biggest advantage of picking their own groups was that students were comfortable with each other.

For the final set of discussions again the students picked their own groups based on what book, out of five, they wanted to read. These groups were a little more mixed as far as friends were concerned. For the most part, students did a good job of picking the book they found interesting and did not pick their group based on what book their friends picked. Students who did pick their book based on peer influence, were disappointed in the end with their selection. Fifty-five percent of the groups ranked their discussion an 8 or 9 out of 10 points. Most students felt that their final discussion went well because people were answering questions completely and that most members were prepared and participated during the conversation. The classes also noted that they could improve their circles by slowing down the conversation and not rushing through answers. They also noted that group members not being prepared for discussion was a common problem.

Next, teacher observation results were analyzed (Appendix C). The first thing teacher observation points out was that certain sections of English 7 were over-all better conversationalists. As reminder, students lost points during the circle if they were off task or were being overly quiet or disengaged, and students kept points for being active, encouraging others, and for adding or expanding to the discussion. As a whole, hour one's class had the lowest average score for their discussions. Several factors could have contributed to this lower average. To begin with, it was first hour of the day. In middle school, it is difficult to get first hour classes to be active because many students are still sleepy. As a group, this class was also more negative about trying new activities. Hour five, as a whole, had the highest average score for discussions. For the most part, this group was the most comfortable with talking in a large group, as well as a small group. These students were always engaged in the conversation, and except for four or five students, most of the talk was on-task. Hours three and six were also good at discussion, but there were larger pockets of students who were very quiet and only responded the minimum times necessary.

The third tool was a videotape of a group of students during five discussions (Appendix D). The original group of four students were mixed up during the series of discussions. The selected students were randomly mixed with other students. Their discussions were captured on tape to show their progress over a semester. The first discussion was taped before the students had been introduced to literature circles. During this discussion, the students were asked to come to the discussion with 10 questions, observations or reflections about the book The Outsiders. Once they were in the group the students were asked to share their ideas. The expectation was that student responses would go up as the students understood how to hold discussions; this expectation was true to some degree. The teacher made a mistake with picking the original group of four girls, in that most of these girls were already good conversationalists. The girls participated most of the time during class and weren't easily intimidated, so the tape does not show an increase in responses. The tape did capture one student who did increase the number of responses as she became acquainted with the literature circle format. During the first literature circle, this student only responded eight times and appeared to be very disengaged from the activity. By the last discussion she was videotaped in, she responded nineteen times and was actively a part of the discussion. In the last discussion she was relaxed and brought a lot of insight into the conversation. Although this student was not a part of the original group, she does represent a positive response to the research question.

What the videotape did show was how the students' conversation, changed as they learned more about literature circles. During the original conversation the girls did a lot of talking, averaging 22 responses in a 20-30 minute time span. The talk was mainly on task with only three off-task moments. The students were excited about being able to talk about the book, so much so that seventeen times the students were all talking at once. For the most part, the conversation was okay; the group mainly talked about the characters and what they liked and didn't like about the book. Some of the questions and observations were irrelevant to the story, and the conversation lacked depth to some degree. For example, the students spent two to three minutes talking about how many times one of the characters was knocked unconscious. This character being knocked out was just a little detail of the story and did not warrant so much conversation time.

After the students were instructed on the different parts of a literature circle and how one could talk about the many different aspects of literature, the nature of the student's discussion changed. Students started to ask questions that were more in depth, which in turn warranted more in-depth responses. When the original group of students reunited for a discussion about The Twelve Labors of Hercules, their conversation was deeper. Here is an example of the kinds of questions asked: Explain how Hercules was a show-off and how he wasn't? Do you think it was right of Hera to hate Hercules? To curse him? How would the story have been different if Hercules was a girl? Would Hercules have been better off dead than doing the tasks? Would you have completed the tasks if you were Hercules? What kind of pain does Hercules feel? How would you describe Hercules' personality? Why did the oracle pick the places he did for Hercules to travel to? With these types of questions, the students' conversations took on a more adult tone and were at a deeper, meaningful level.

The final piece of evidence that supported the research was that of the whole class discussion (Appendix E). This part of the research also contained some of the most surprising, and somewhat disturbing results. The published research that supports literature circle use emphasizes that literature circles engage a larger number of students in a discussion of the text. This belief was re-emphasized in the statistics gathered during whole class discussion. Many times during the whole class discussion, a discussion was viewed as going well if a lot of talk took place and interesting points were brought up. These observations of a good discussion are still true, but what most teachers do not notice is that only a handful of students actually participated. During 1st hour, only 36.7% of the students actually participated in three whole class discussions. The statistical averages for the other three hours were as follows: 3rd hour- 34.7%, 5th hour 54%, and 6th hour 47%. Even looking at the group with the highest average, 5th hour, 46% of the students did not participate in the conversation. A further break down of the information revealed that the number of students dominating the whole conversation was even smaller. When looking more closely at who was responding, it was discovered that out of the students who did respond during the discussion, on the average, 48% of those students responded two or more times. In 3rd hour, the class with the lowest over-all participation, 34.7%, it was found that 55% of the students responded two or more times. This means that six students out of 31 were actually dominating the talk. The results found that literature circles do increase the number of times students respond in a discussion, and more importantly, engage more students in the learning process.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Once students were comfortable with literature circles and understood how they worked, the activity was an effective way of engaging students in discussion. The research was successful because the nature of literature circles caused most students to actively participate. The only factor that contributed to a student not being active was if the student hadn't completed any of the reading and thus did not understand the questions being asked. Although the videotape didn't show that all students increased the number of times a student responded in a circle, it did show three other pieces of evidence. The tape did show that a student who was not an active participator in class increased the number of times s/he responded in a literature circle, once s/he was comfortable with the activity. The tape also showed that once all students understood how circles worked, students were capable of having more in-depth, adult-like conversations. Finally, the tape also showed that all students responded more during a literature circle than during a whole class discussion; many students averaged at least twelve responses during a circle, compared to one response during a whole class discussion. The surveys emphasized that a majority of students liked literature circles and felt that circles helped them to talk more about books.

The findings of the research question reaffirm the continued use of literature circles in the classroom. The research, published and unpublished, show that literature circles are an effective tool to engage students in reading and talking about books. Literature circles also helped to increase reading comprehension, listening skills, and critical thinking skills. The circles helped students to interact with a story in a real world manner. The benefits of literature circles need to be shared with other teachers. One way this could be done would be to hold a teacher training about literature circles and the positive effects it can have on the classroom. Such training could be offered through an in-service or professional growth opportunities. Hopefully through training, other teachers will start to use literature circles as an integral part of their classrooms also.

The teacher also must be aware of how literature circles need to be improved and altered. Although literature circles were effective, the teacher needs to keep a balance between how they want the circles to work and how the circles are actually designed to work. To ensure that literature circles are being used properly, the teacher will need to self-monitor his/her motives behind using the activity. For this reason, s/he may want to videotape a session and analyze it. Students need to be reminded that being critical of other members doesn't add to conversation but takes away from it. The teacher also needs to explain that students do not need to feel tied to their roles. The teacher needs to encourage students not to rely only on their role sheets for discussion topics, but also to discuss the questions and thoughts that are triggered during the discussion these are an invaluable part of conversation. The teacher needs to wean students off of role sheets once they understand what kind of talk can take place in a literature circle. This will help students to move to a more authentic conversation.

In conclusion, the research and the experts clearly affirm that literature circles are an effective way of engaging students in reading comprehension, critical thinking, and analytical thinking.

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Appendix A

Literature Circle Role Descriptions

Literature Circle- Role Descriptions

Discussion Director – Your job is to create thinking/thick questions that help your group talk about all the parts of the book. You should make sure everyone in your group shares their job. You need to make sure everyone is heard from within your group, and you should encourage people to explain their answers fully. To receive full credit for your job you must have 10 discussion questions written.

Literary Luminary – Your job is to find at least 4 passages (a passage is at least one paragraph long) to read orally to the group. After reading the passage, you need to explain to the group why you think the passage is important to the story, and/or you can ask the group why they think the passage is important by asking thinking/thick questions. The passages you pick might be: descriptive, confusing, funny, important, well written, thought provoking, or controversial. To receive full credit for your job you must also refer to what part of the plot structure (exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action or resolution) the passage comes from and have your role sheet filled out.

Illustrator – Your job is to create 1-2 drawings, paintings, or whatever medium you choose, to show an important scene from the section read. Present your picture to the group and ask everyone what scene they think the picture resembles. After everyone has guessed, you should share what scene it is and why the scene is important to the story (please include this information on the back of your picture). To receive full credit for this job you must present a neat and creative piece of art that shows noticeable effort.

Word Wizard – Your job is to find 10 words that the group may not know. If you have vocabulary work with the book you may not use these words. Look up a definition for the word and find a synonym. When it is your turn to share ask someone from your group to guess at the meaning of the word and then give the group the definition. To receive full credit you must have at least 10 words, definitions and synonyms.

Character Connection – Your job is to analyze one of the main characters of your book. You need to create five thinking/thick questions to ask your group about the character. You then need to create a list that shows what the character sees, thinks, feels, does, stands for, and says or what other characters say about him/her. To receive full credit for your job complete the above and the role sheet.

Summarizer – Your job is to prepare a summary for the appointed readings. You need to make sure you include the main points and important events of the readings. If there are many important points/events you may want to number them in the order they happened in. To receive full credit for your job you will need to have a summary that is accurate and written in complete sentences.

Travel Tracer – Your job is to trace the movement with in the book. You need to share with your group where the action of the book is taking place. Describe the setting for the major events in the book, and if possible, read aloud the description of the setting directly from the book. Ask your group how and why the setting is important. You should draw a map to show the actual movement of the main characters. To receive full credit for your job complete the above things and fill out your role sheet.

Investigator – Your job is to look into the background information about the book or the author. You shouldn't write a report, but you should bring at least10-12 interesting facts to the group. Check your role sheet for things you can investigate. To receive full credit you must include the number of facts stated and use complete sentences.

Connector – Your job is to look into how the book can be connected to your group member's lives and your world. You need to list 5 connections and create one question you could ask the group about the connection. Think about text to self, text to world, and text-to-text connections. To receive full credit for your job complete the above and use complete sentences.

Roles based on Harvey Daniels' Literature Circle components

Appendix B

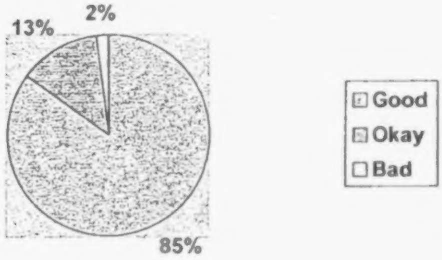
Student Survey Responses

Appendix B

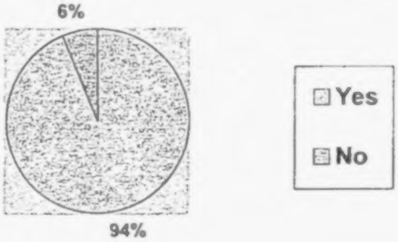
Student Survey Responses

Discussion 1 – Julie of the Wolves or The Call of the Wild

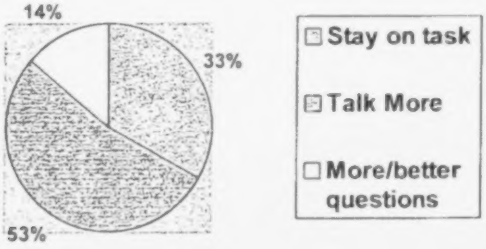
Question 1 "How did your discussion go?"



Question 2 "Did you feel comfortable with your group members?"

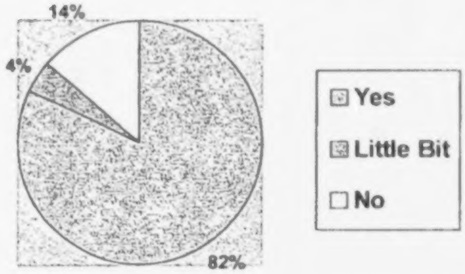


Question 3 "How would you improve your literature circle

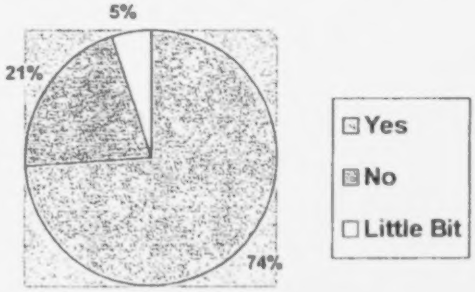


Discussion I – Julie of the Wolves or The Call of the Wild

Question 4 "Do you feel this activity helped you talk more about books?"

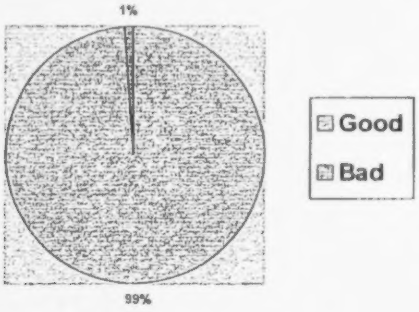


Question 5 "Did you like this activity?"

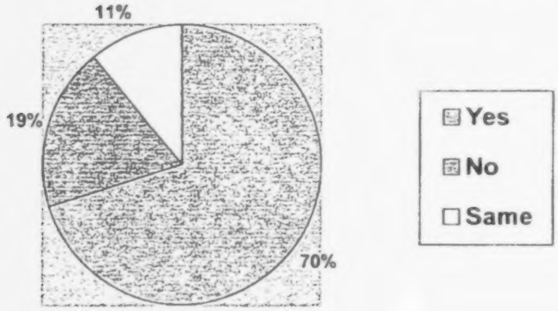


Discussion 2 - Julie of the Wolves or The Call of the Wild

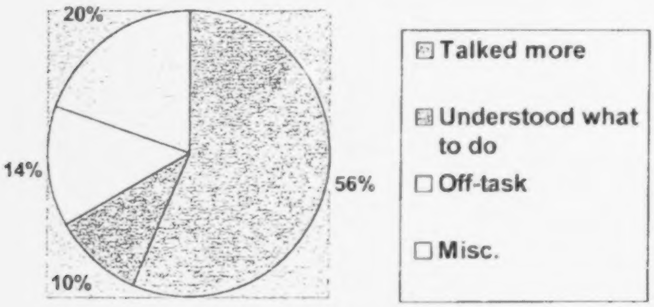
Question 1 "How did your discussion go?"



Question 2 "Did this discussion go better or worse than your last one?"



Question 3 "How was this discussion better or worse?"



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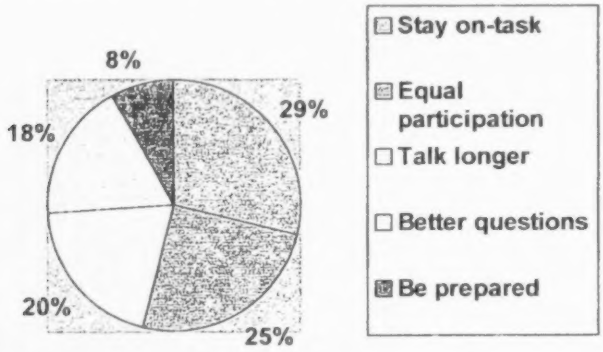
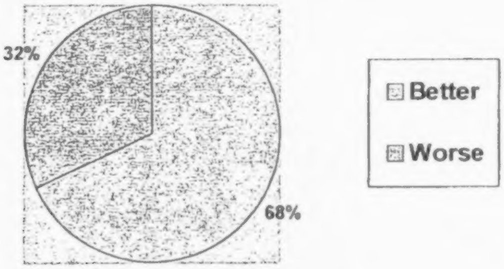
Discussion 2 - Julie of the Wolves or The Call of the Wild

Question 4 "How would you improve the discussion?"



Discussion 3 – "The Twelve Labors of Hercules"

Question 1 "Did this Literature Circle go better or worse than the last one?"



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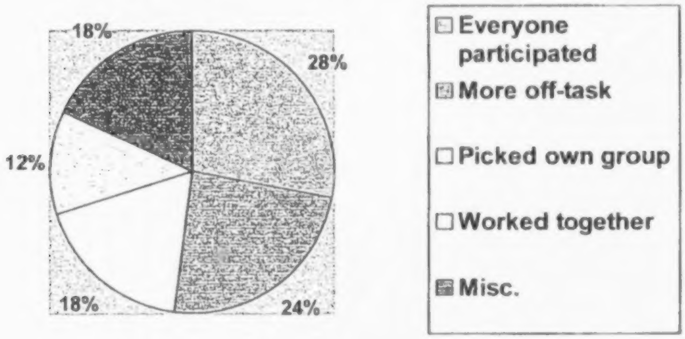
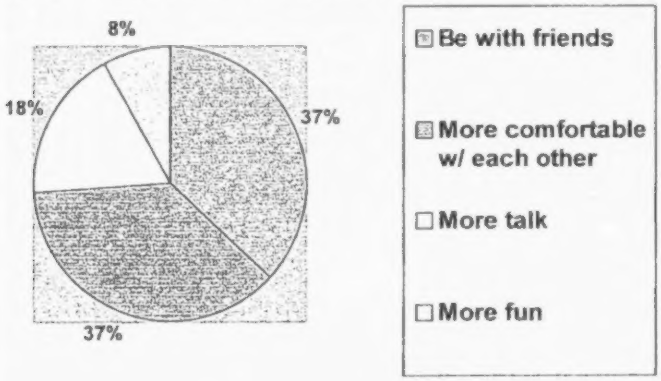
Discussion 3 – "The Twelve Labors of Hercules"

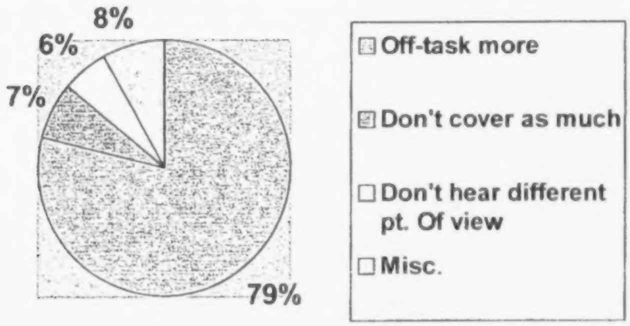
Question 2 "Why did the discussion go better or worse?"



Question 3 "What is an advantage to picking your own group?"



Question 4 " What is a disadvantage to picking your own group?"



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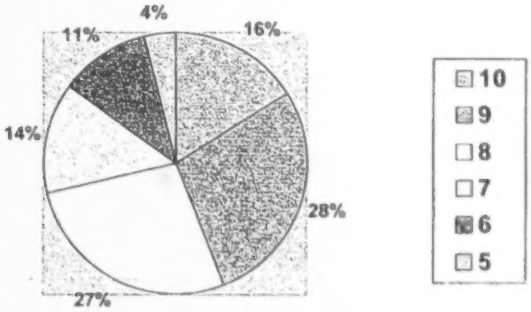
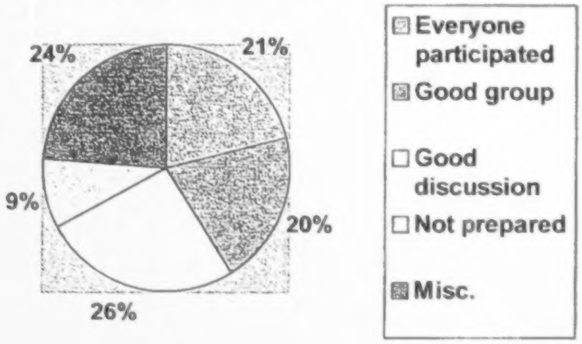
Discussion 4 – Catherine Called Birdy, Ramsay Scallop, The Door in the Wall, The Trumpeter of Krakow, The Sword in the Stone

Question 1 "Rate your discussion on a scale of 1-10"



Question 2 "Why did you rate your discussion this way?"



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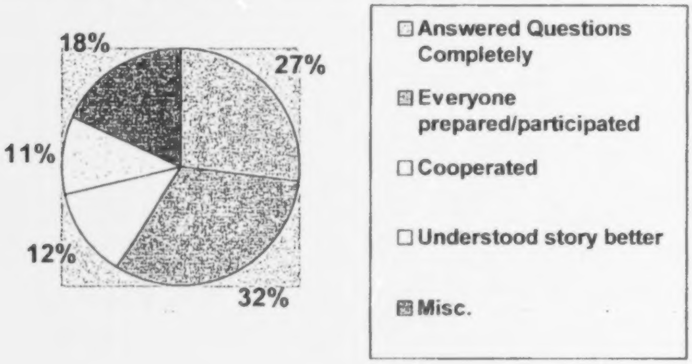
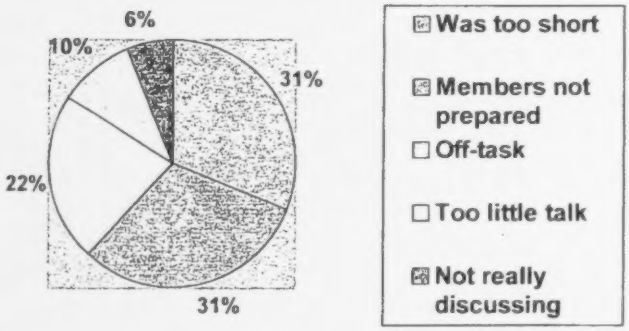
Discussion 4 – Catherine Called Birdy, Ramsay Scallop, The Door in the Wall, The Trumpeter of Krakow, The Sword in the Stone

Question 3 "What went well with your discussion?"



Question 4 "What took away from the discussion?"



Appendix C

Teacher Observation

Appendix C

Teacher Observation- average scores and ranges of scores during literature circles.

1st Hour	Mean	Range
1st Discussion	16.7	20-15
2nd Discussion	16.4	20-12
3rd Discussion	17	20-17
4th Discussion	17	20-12

3rd Hour	Mean	Range
1st Discussion	18	20-10
2nd Discussion	19	20-14
3rd Discussion	18	20-13
4th Discussion	17.8	20-10

5th Hour	Mean	Range
1st Discussion	17.5	20-15
2nd Discussion	18.7	20-16
3rd Discussion	18.0	20-13
4th Discussion	18.6	20-14

6th Hour	Mean	Range
1st Discussion	17	20-13
2nd Discussion	18	20-14
3rd Discussion	18	20-14
4th Discussion	18	20-13

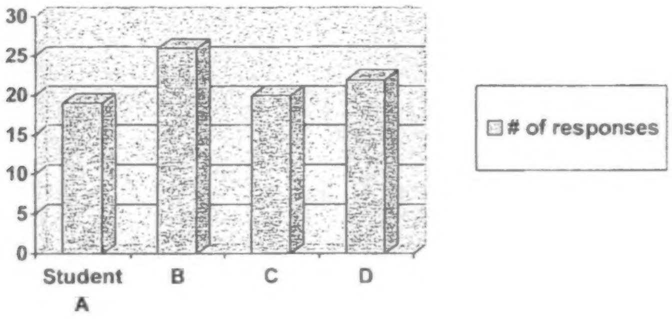
*1st discussion – The Call of the Wild or Julie of the Wolves
2nd discussion - The Call of the Wild or Julie of the Wolves
3rd discussion – "The Twelve Labors of Hercules"
4th discussion – Catherine Called Birdy, The Ramsay Scallop, The Door in the Wall, The Trumpeter of Krakow, The Sword in the Stone

Appendix D

Videotaped Literature Circles

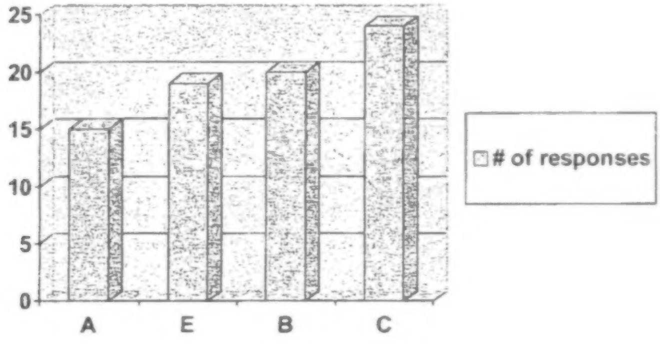
Videotaped Literature Circles of 5th Hour Appendix D

Discussion 1 – The Outsiders



Off-task behavior – 3
Talking at the same time - 17

Discussion 4 – "The Twelve Labors of Hercules"

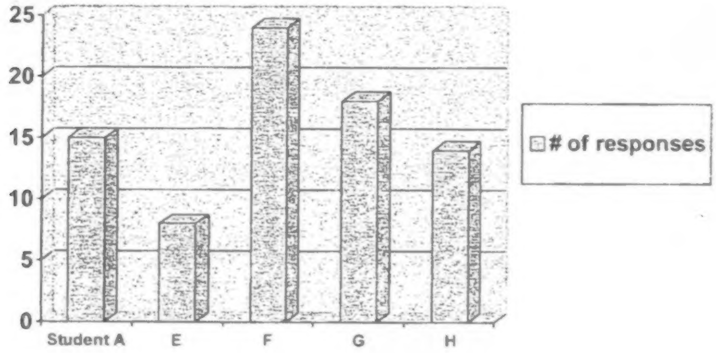


Off-task behavior – 2
Talking at the same time

* Student D from Discussion 1 was missing for Discussion 4, Student E took the place of this student.

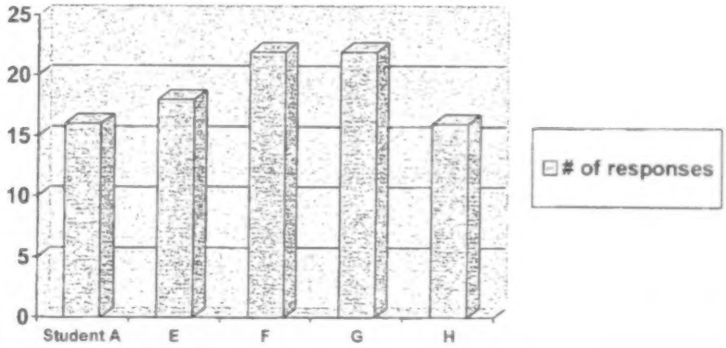
Videotaped Literature Circles of 5th Hour Appendix D

Discussion 2 – The Call of the Wild



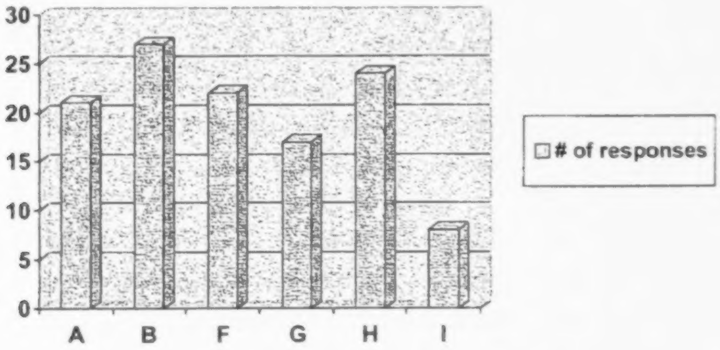
Off-task behavior – 8
Talking at the same time – 9

Discussion 3 – The Call of the Wild



Off-task behavior – 4
Talking at the same time – 6

Discussion 5 – "The Sword and the Stone"



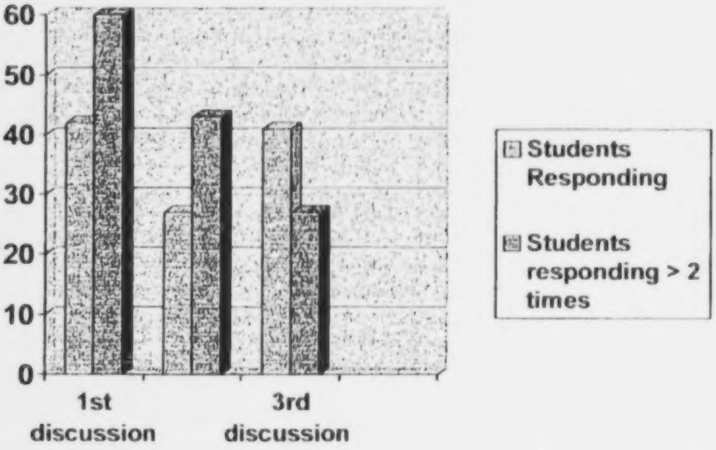
Off-task behavior – 6
Talking at the same time – 15

Appendix E

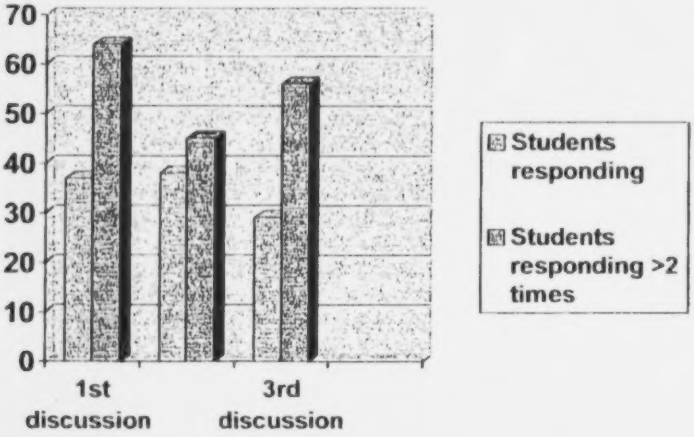
Whole Class Discussion

1st Hour - Whole Class Discussion

Appendix E



3rd Hour – Whole Class Discussion



*1st discussion – "Echo and Narcissus
2nd discussion – "King Midas"
3rd discussion – Brian's Song

WILL STUDENTS BE ABLE TO OBTAIN INFORMATION MORE QUICKLY AND ACCURATELY FROM A HARD COPY OF THE *USA TODAY* OR ITS INTERNET SITE?

by

TODD FRANCIS GASNER

B.A., University of Wisconsin, 1994

B.S., Winona State University, 1996

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Winona State University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Education

December 2002

This capstone entitled:

Will Students be Able to Obtain Information More Quickly and Accurately From a Hard Copy of the *USA Today* or Its Internet Site?

written by Todd Francis Gasner

has been approved for the Winona State University Department of Education by

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Faculty Advisor

Date 12/7/02

The final copy of this capstone has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Gasner, Todd Francis (M.S., Education)

Will Students be Able to Obtain Information More Quickly and Accurately
From a Hard copy of the *USA Today* or Its Internet Site?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

As part of my Individual Growth and Assessment Plan, I met with my supervisor to establish a goal or job target that coordinated both with the district aims and our site improvement plan.

I wanted to explore and compare student perceptions and performance of the media in terms of the newspaper verses the Internet as a resource. Five high school students from my Skills class were selected to participate in this study. The students were first asked to generate their own hypothesis as to which resource they felt they would obtain information from more quickly and accurately, the *USA Today* or its Internet site. Next, the students were given two quizzes, one for the newspaper and one for the Internet. Both quizzes had approximately two questions from each of the four sections of the newspaper. The questions were derived from comparable length articles. Students were timed and scored on both quizzes. Then the students graphed their results. At the end of the project each student was asked which media resource they preferred, the newspaper or the Internet. Results indicated that, on average, students were able to extract information more quickly and accurately from a hard copy of the newspaper compared to the

newspaper's Internet site. Nonetheless, a majority of the student population preferred using the technological Internet resource as opposed to the old traditional newspaper.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Campus School is a Care and Treatment program within the Rochester Public Schools. We work with a diverse population of students in a variety of settings. Our clientele is placed in our program through court services. We service the Many Rivers Juvenile Center and the Von Wald Youth Shelter. Many Rivers Juvenile Center is divided into three separate entities: juvenile detention center (JDC), juvenile holdover center (JHC), and the residential treatment center (RTC). For virtue of this study, I focused on the students in our residential treatment center (RTC). This was the only setting with access to the Internet, which was a necessary component for my research.

The residential treatment center (RTC) consists of three different units. There is the Start unit, the Restore unit, and the Stop unit. Students in the residential treatment program are all boys ranging from 10 to 18 years old. The Start unit is a short-term consequence program. The length of stay typically varies from 30 days to 90 days. The Restore unit focuses on younger boys who meet criteria for being at-risk of committing a sexual offense. The length of stay in this unit is at least a year and a half. The Stop unit is a sophisticated long-term treatment program for adjudicated sex offenders. The length of stay in this program is usually at least two years. The total number of potential students in the residential treatment center (RTC) is 24, 8 students per unit.

The beauty of the residential treatment center (RTC) is that our student population remains consistent enough to place the students in specific grade appropriate classes. At our other alternate sites, turnover is so great and students vary so much in their academic and developmental abilities that we have to do a lot of individualized instruction. In our residential treatment program we have also incorporated skills classes to the curriculum. These classes focus on independent social skills for our students, while allowing the teacher to choose information that he or she feels suitable and important to address. Therefore, I chose to use the students in my skills class from the residential treatment center (RTC) as subjects for my research.

Need for the Study

After September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on America, I felt I had an obligation and duty to educate my students about this historic event. As an educator, this event was a rude awakening to my own ignorance surrounding cultural/world affairs. I quickly realized from classroom discussions that my students were also clueless and desperately seeking answers. I felt a newspaper would be the best tool to provide the students and myself with the essential information to shed light on our sheltered views. Therefore, I wanted to do a study, which would encourage my students to utilize the newspaper. I felt this is a lifelong resource that could help my students become informed and educated learners in regards to worldwide issues, while promoting their literacy skills. I wanted my research to help my students gain an understanding and respect for cultural differences by utilizing the content to generate in-depth classroom discussions among my students.

I also wanted to focus on the technological resource of the Internet for a variety of reasons. First, personally, I wanted to overcome my computer phobia and become more knowledgeable and confident in regards to this classroom resource. Secondly, I have observed increased student enthusiasm and less classroom disruptions with students when given the opportunity to utilize this resource. Lastly, technology seems to be the "wave of the future." Therefore, I felt I would be doing a great disservice to my students if I were not exposing them to this valuable resource. Internet technology has provided the classroom with a powerful tool, but just like any resource, a teacher must learn how to manage the classroom to optimize its effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

There has been such a shift of focus to use technology in the educational setting with so much positive hype surrounding the technological resource of the Internet. I felt teachers and other resource personnel were replacing all their research resources with the Internet. Therefore, I wanted to conduct a study comparing the technological resource of the Internet with the traditional print from a hard copy of the newspaper. I wanted to focus on two critical components of literacy: fluency as measured by speed, and comprehension as measured by accuracy. With limited class time with students each day, I wanted to establish what resource would increase student productivity. I felt this was important, because it follows under one of our district aims of effective and efficient operations.

Statement of the Question

Will students be able to obtain information more quickly and accurately from a hard copy of the *USA Today* or its' Internet site?

Definition of Terms

- **Reading Fluency:** the index of the degree to which a reader's oral reading resembles everyday spoken language.
- **Reading Comprehension:** to read for meaning.
- **Metacomprehension:** awareness of his or her understanding.
- **Computer Literacy:** generally defined as computer awareness and knowledge.
- **Appreciation:** the capacity to understand, learn from, and above all enjoy literary works.
- **"Surfing":** typical approach to finding information on the World Wide Web, by following links from page to page in order to arrive at the desired information.
- **"Links":** electronic transfers to related topics or sites on the Internet.
- **Construct Validity:** whether the test actually measures aspects of the behavior under consideration.
- **Newshole:** the amount of print-space or air-time available to report the news.
- **"At-risk" youth:** predictive validity for such unwanted behaviors as truancy, dropping out of school, or criminal activity.
- **Digital Divide:** the same divergence found in society along cultural and racial lines also exists online and offline.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was the small sample of students that was used. Due to conditions of my position, I had to be selective in regards to my subject population. The Campus School was the only setting with Internet access I could use to conduct my study. Also, my Skills class was the only class with a flexible curriculum that allowed me to conduct my research.

A second limitation was my "at-risk" student population and data collection process, due to my research subjects. I had one student who encountered disciplinary measures on the unit. Therefore, he was unable to participate in the last week of the activity, thus potentially skewing the data. We also have strict policies in place for Internet usage at our site. Therefore, one of my higher achieving students was restricted from participating in the Internet sample. I did, however, use him as a control to test the construct validity between my two different tests.

Another limitation was my student's prior knowledge. I may have had students who knew some of the information on the tests without having to read the article. I conducted the study under the assumption that my students had no prior knowledge of the information.

The last limitation I found had to do with the two sources, the Internet and the newspaper. The Internet site wasn't laid out exactly like that of the newspaper, especially when it came to the graphics between the two sources. The visual graphics and captions in the newspaper were not always replicated on the Internet site. I used the newspaper as the source for making my tests.

It would be interesting to see if the data would change if I used the Internet site to create my tests. Also, my students seemed to experience some problems with the network on the date of the last Internet quiz sample. I did, however, utilized this data, because I felt this was a natural consequence when using technology as a resource.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Computer-Assisted Reading Instruction

Research studies (Reinking, 1988) show that computer instruction is effective for a wide variety of reading skills and concept areas. For the first decades of online training, it was difficult to convince most people that it was a legitimate form of education. There was resistance to using technology in the classroom, because it was different from traditional classroom methods (Kearsley, 2002). Technological advancements have made computers a permanent tool in most classrooms (Simic, 1993).

Guidelines for Computer Instruction

1) Computer instruction in reading should focus on meaning and stress reading comprehension (Simic, 1993).
2) Computer instruction in reading should foster active involvement and stimulate thinking (Simic, 1993).
3) Computer instruction in reading should build upon students' prior knowledge helping them make sense of current issues (Simic, 1993).
4) Computer instruction in reading should make use of a wide variety of subject areas (Simic, 1993).

Effectiveness of Computer Instruction

Kearsley (2002) emphasized specific criteria essential for effective computer instructional methods. First, the student needs to be self-disciplined and be able to take initiative. Second, the student should have convenient access to computers and the Internet. Lastly, the student should possess computer literacy and a basic understanding of computers. Kearsley (2002) then also explained some key components for successful computer instruction that the teacher must possess. The teacher must have access to computers and be proactive by spending time troubleshooting student and system problems. The instructor must also enjoy using technology as a resource to teach. Kearsley (2002) also pointed out that computer-assisted instruction is not conducive to every subject area. He acknowledged that computer instruction might not be beneficial where hands-on methods of instruction are needed. He also mentioned that with computer instruction it is difficult to address social skills such as communication, leadership, and customer relations. Kearsley (2002) also pointed out limitations due to the "digital divide." He addressed the issue that certain cultures and students' socio-economic backgrounds may influence the overall performance and success of computer-based instructional methods.

Comprehension

Reading comprehension is defined as reading for meaning. Standiford (1984) coined the term metacomprehension representing one's awareness of his or her own understanding. Establishing this distinction, she classified her students in one of the four following categories:

High Comprehension – High Metacomprehension (Students who know and are aware they know).

Low Comprehension – High Metacomprehension (Students who do not know and realize they do not know).

High Comprehension – Low Metacomprehension (Students who know but think they do not know).

Low Comprehension – Low Metacomprehension (Students who do not know but think they do know).

Baker and Brown (1980) explained three main reasons for comprehension failures:

1) The learner does not have enough information about the topic to interpret the message accurately.
2) The learner has the appropriate knowledge, but does not have prior knowledge base to accurately make sense of the information.
3) The learner interprets the message consistently, but the interpretation does not match the one intended by the author or speaker.

In order to improve reading comprehension strategies the readers need to learn how to engage in certain activities to achieve goals of reading (Stewart and Tei, 1983). Schallent and Kleiman (1979) suggested strategies that teachers can use to help students' metacomprehension. First, instruction should focus the reader's attention on the main ideas. Second, asking the students open-ended questions about their understanding can help them monitor their own comprehension. Third, it is important to relate the student's prior knowledge to the new information. This helps give the reader meaning and understanding. It is not enough for teachers to be aware of their students' comprehension awareness. It is also critical to develop the student's own awareness (Schallent and Kleiman 1979).

The Role of Newspapers and Current Events

Benenson (1991) addressed the importance of the National Education Goal for increasing the curricular focus on global and citizenship education. Gagnon (1989) stated that history is typically not retained well by students, because they fail to make connections between the information and their background knowledge. Students are selective and inconsistent in their news consumption habits. Students typically do not find history and the news relevant to their lives (Engle, 1990). Aiex (1988) addressed the importance of the newspaper as a teaching tool. Newspapers appeal to students who are not easily motivated, because they offer a wide variety of literature content to meet individual student interests. Newspapers are a readily available reading source that can help promote and develop students into life-long readers. Schlene (1991) stated that students need to be taught to read critically, and ask questions. Once this skill is established, a newspaper can be an effective tool for the student to develop connections between his or her self and the world around him or her.

Technology and Motivation

Small (1997) emphasized the primary goal of education as developing students into life-long learners. Students must be intrinsically motivated, display curiosity, find learning to be fun, and continue to seek knowledge on their own. She stated there are two prerequisites for this to occur: (1) the student must value the task and (2) the student must believe he or she can succeed at the task. Studies done by Glennan (1996) indicated that teachers' use of the Internet vary greatly according to the teacher's perception of its value for instructional purposes. Stoicheva (2000) found that "at-risk" students had increased motivation and improved literacy skills using the Internet. Students seemed empowered using this resource and reported an improved self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment with this resource. Casey (1992) pointed out that technology appeals to students because of its multi-sensory approach. Technology often uses visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches to learning, making the learning process more interactive. Cobine (1997) addressed the importance of technology giving students an opportunity to respond and research topics more in-depth through "links."

CHAPTER III

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Participants

Participants for this study included five male residential treatment students from my Skills class. I chose students from the residential treatment setting for a variety of reasons. First, these students are typically more long term in comparison to some of the other settings. I felt this consistency would provide me with more solid data. Second, the residential treatment students were the only student population with Internet access, a necessary component of my study. I chose the students from my Skills class, because this class had the most flexible curriculum of the classes I teach. I also felt it was important for my students to be aware of current issues and events, especially after the historic Terrorist Tragedy on September 11th. My students and I shared many common emotions, concerns, and questions after this tragedy. Therefore, I felt this class would provide an excellent opportunity for our class to explore some of these important current events.

Procedures

First, I spent about a week with my students informally familiarizing them with our two testing resources. We explored and discussed some of the essential components and parts of the *USA Today* newspaper and its Internet site. The students were informed that they were going to be taking part in a study comparing these two resources. The students were asked to predict, or come up with a hypothesis about their own personal performance in regards to these two resources. The students were told they would be given a short answer quiz in respect to each resource. The students were told that they would be timed and scored on these quizzes. Therefore, the students were asked to address the variables of time and accuracy within their personal hypothesis. From the hard copy of the newspaper, I created two quizzes for each testing date. I had four different testing dates in all. The quizzes were made up of approximately two questions from each section of the newspaper. By choosing questions from all of the different sections of the newspaper, I felt I would be exposing my students to diverse topics and issues. I thought this would help my students understand the depth of the newspaper as a literature source, while hopefully meeting the individual interest and needs of all my students. I tried to pick articles that I felt would provide my students with important and useful information for understanding the world around them, while invoking interesting classroom discussions. I also tried to find two articles comparable in length from each section of the paper while constructing the quizzes. I didn't want the data to be skewed as a result of the student being able to find the information more quickly on one test compared to the other due to article size. When the students entered the classroom on a quiz day, I had the computers up and running on the *USA Today* Internet site. I didn't want student login time to affect the time or results of the data. We always did the Internet site testing before the hard copy of the newspaper testing, because the Internet site is updated daily. I actually purchased the hard copies of the newspaper, so the students could use this resource at any time for the newspaper data sample. Each quiz identified by name the four different articles from which the quiz questions were derived. Therefore, the students told which article to look for the necessary information. Once the student completed the quiz, he was told to raise his hand signaling to me that he was finished. I would then write that students time down, so he wouldn't disrupt his peers. After everyone was finished, I would correct the quiz out loud in class. We used this time to generate dialogue and classroom discussions. The student was then given his quiz back and told to graph his results. This process was repeated the next class period, using the hard copy of the newspaper instead of the Internet site. Approximately one month after the completion of this study, the students were informally asked which resource they preferred using the Internet or the newspaper and why.

Data Collection Tools

The students were given their results after each quiz. The students were instructed to graph their individual results using the Continuous Improvement philosophy. This philosophy provided my students with immediate feedback allowing them to visually compare their results in a more effective and efficient manner. This process also helped my students take more ownership in their learning and seemed to encourage them to become active participants in their progress. My students learned the importance of data collection and analysis by utilizing this tool.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Process

The data was analyzed independently for each student and as a whole group. First, the total time was calculated by adding the sum of the time each student spent on each quiz. This was done for both quizzes: the Internet and the hard copy of the newspaper. After the total time was determined, this information was used to calculate the average time each student spent on each question for each quiz. Next, adding up the total number of correct responses and dividing it by the total number of possible questions calculated the student's comprehension percentages. This was done for both quizzes, so the student could determine which resource he had more success with. Then, I calculated the group results. The total time each student spent on each quiz was added together in order to compare the results from both quizzes. After the total time for each quiz was determined, the average amount of time spent on each question was calculated for both resources. Next, adding up the total number correct responses and dividing it by the total number of possible questions determined group comprehension scores. This was done for both quizzes. I had one student who did both quizzes, yet only used the newspaper as his resource for finding the information. I used his data to determine the construct validity between my two testing samples. I wanted to make sure my data wasn't significantly influenced by a difference in the level of difficulty between my separate quizzes.

Results

This study was designed to test the effectiveness of different literature resources. Fluency was determined by the time it took the students to complete each quiz. Comprehension was determined by the student's accuracy in completing each quiz. Each of my four subjects was, on the average, able to obtain information more quickly and accurately using the hard copy of the newspaper verses the Internet as a resource. See Table 1 below:

	NEWSPAPER		**INTERNET**	
Student	**Average Time/ Question**	**% Correct**	**Average Time/ Question**	**% Correct**
1	**1min. 44sec.**	**89%**	**2min. 28sec.**	**81%**
2	**1min. 51sec**	**89%**	**2min. 40sec.**	**69%**
3	**1min. 34sec**	**83%**	**3min. 24sec.**	**74%**
4	**1min. 04sec**	**83%**	**2min. 29sec.**	**66%**

All of this information was then compiled to compare the group results. Since each individual student was quicker and more accurate using the hard copy of the newspaper in comparison to the Internet, it was determined that these results would remain consistent when comparing the group as a whole. See Table 2 below:

	Total Average Time Per Question	**Average % Correct**
Newspaper	**1min. 32sec.**	**86%**
Internet	**2min. 47sec.**	**72%**

In order to test the construct validity between my two quiz samples, I utilized my one student who was restricted from using technology as my control sample. This student was given both quizzes, yet he was instructed to use the hard copy of the newspaper as his resource for obtaining the information on both. His results were then also charted. See Table 3 below:

	Total Average Time Per Question	**Average % Correct**
Newspaper	**1min. 11sec.**	**94%**
Internet	**1min. 16sec.**	**94%**

These results indicated to me that my two quizzes, on the average, were valid in degree of difficulty. I realized there was a significant difference between the amount of time and the percent correct on the weekly quizzes. However, when I calculated the average results this weekly variation seemed to be insignificant.

Approximately one month after the study, I wanted to gain insight into my student's perceptions of this project. Therefore, I informally asked each student participant which resource he enjoyed more the hard copy of the newspaper or the Internet. Surprisingly, 3 out of 4 of my students preferred using the Internet as opposed to the hard copy of the newspaper. This was contradictory to my results, as my students had more success with the hard copy of the newspaper.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Action Plan

Based on the results from this study, it may be concluded that students are able to obtain information more quickly and accurately from a hard copy of the newspaper in comparison to its Internet site. However, since the results were based on such a small sample size, it is not possible to determine the statistical significance. It is important to note, that even though the results indicate the hard copy of the newspaper seemed to be the more effective tool, a majority of my students still preferred using the Internet as a classroom resource.

After conducting this study and completing my literature review, I feel newspapers are an effective classroom tool, regardless of their format. Classroom discussions can greatly benefit from student awareness in current issues. I also feel students benefit from exposure to this practical literature resource. Newspapers address a wide variety of topics, issues, and concerns. Therefore, newspapers seem to cater to the individual needs and interests of students. In the future, I plan on utilizing both of these resources in my classroom. I feel it is important to expose students to a variety of literary resources, and I feel they can learn something from each. The results of this study leave me wondering, which is more important for comprehension, motivation and enthusiasm or accuracy and efficiency?

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APPENDIX A

Individual predictions and personal hypothesis from the student's perspective.

"What resource do you think you will be able to obtain information from more quickly and accurately the hard copy of the newspaper or the Internet?"

Hypothesis Student 1:

"I think I will be able to find the information faster on the Internet, because I won't have to turn the pages. I think I'll be more accurate with the hard copy of the newspaper, because when there is print the article might be more in depth and have more details."

Hypothesis Student 2:

"I think I can get information faster and more accurately from the Internet. This is because the Internet is unlimited in space. I also think the Internet is more orderly."

Hypothesis Student 3:

"I feel I will get information more quickly and accurately from the hard copy of the newspaper, because they have different sections. So, you know where to look. I think they put more details in the newspaper, too."

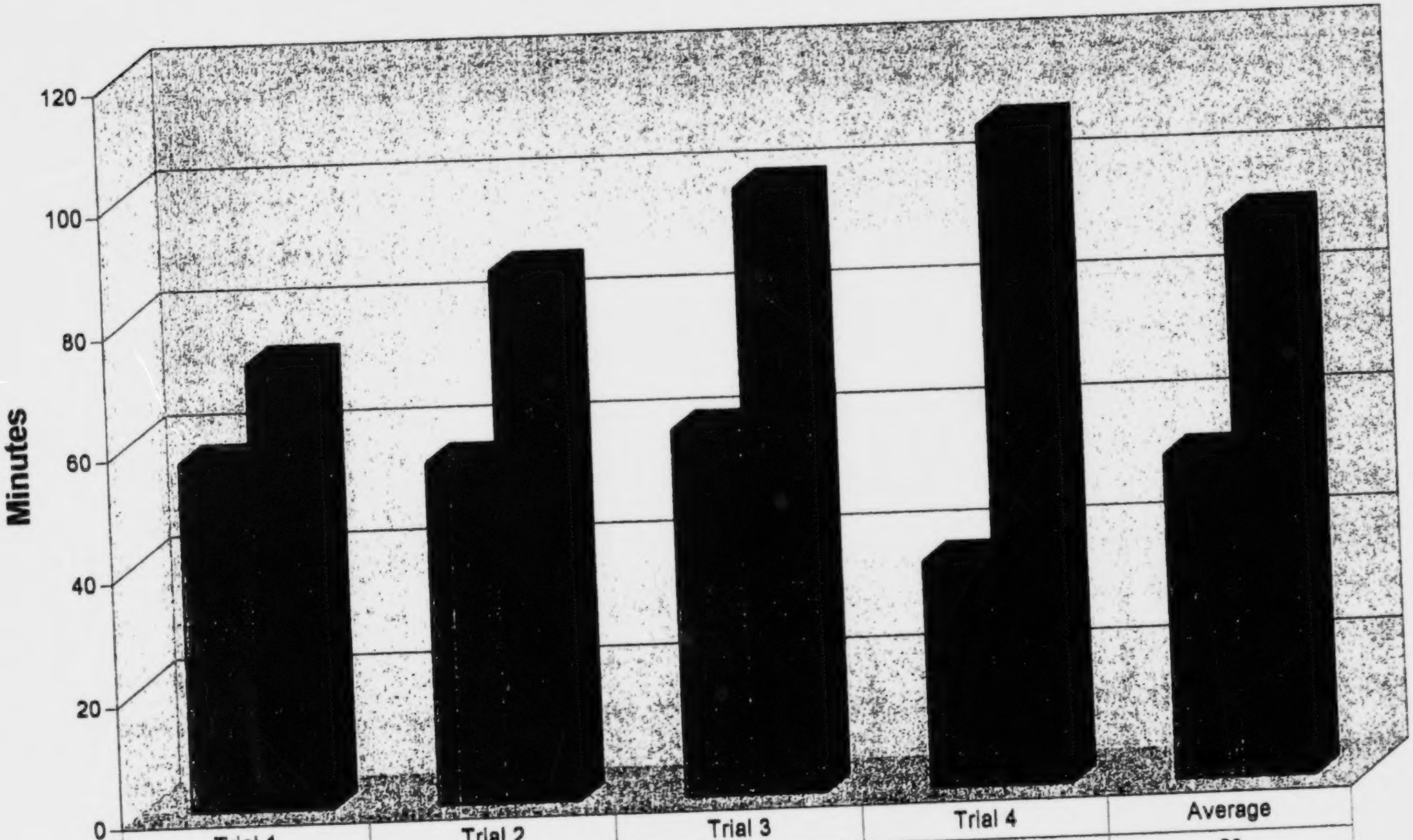
Hypothesis Student 4:

"I feel I will be able to access information more quickly and accurately from the Internet, because I think it will be quicker and easier."

APPENDIX B

Group results, on a graph, comparing the amount of time spent on each of the quiz resources.

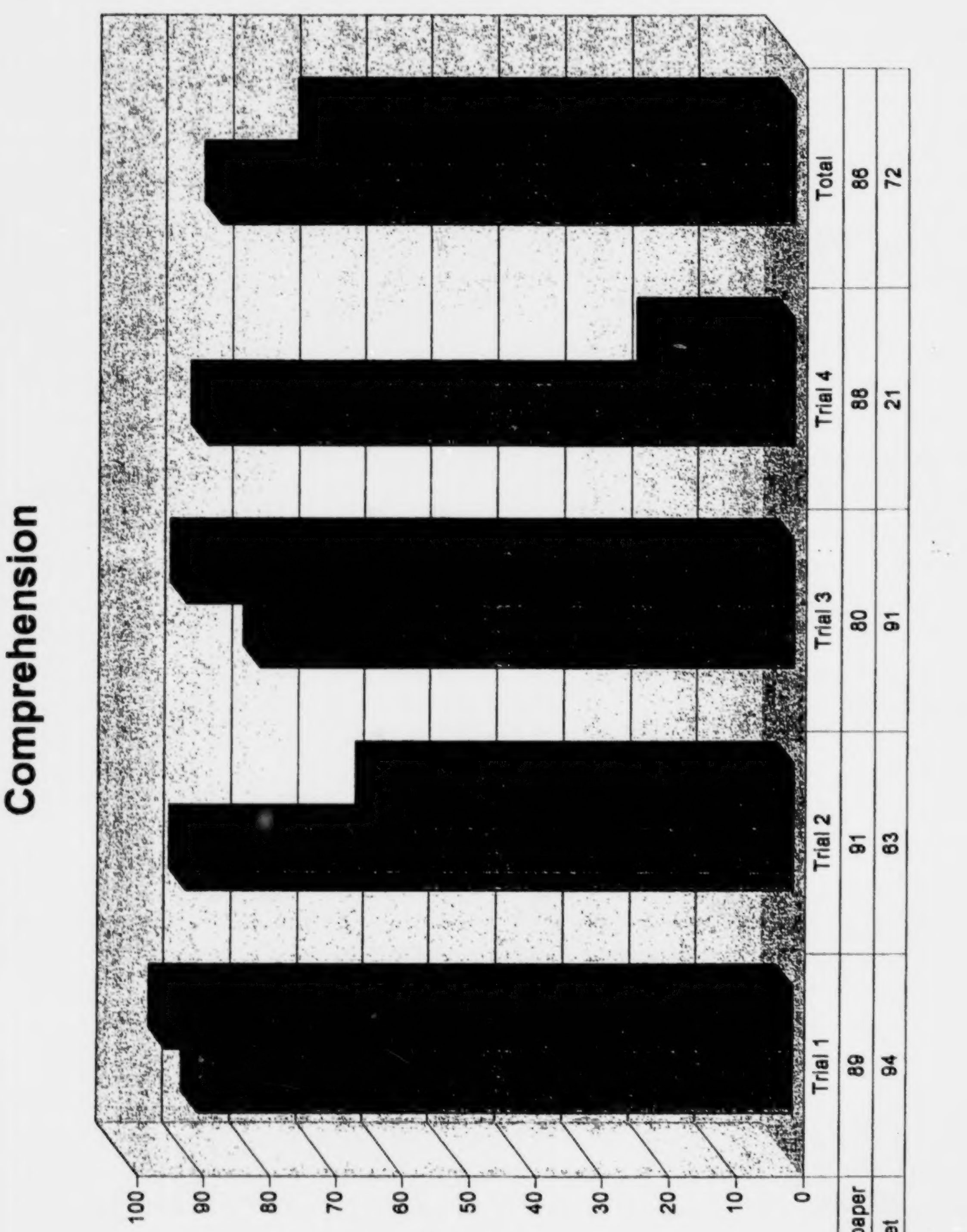
Total Time Per Trial



	Trial 1	Trial 2	Trial 3	Trial 4	Average
▨ Newspaper	57	56	60	37	53
■ Internet	73	87	99	108	92

APPENDIX C

Group results, on a graph, comparing percentage correct on comprehension between each of the quiz sources.


Comprehension
Percentage Correct
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Trial 1
Trial 2
Trial 3
Trial 4
Total
Newspaper 89 91 80 88 86
Internet 94 63 91 21 72

APPENDIX D

Student responses to informal question in regards to their personal preferences.

"What resource did you enjoy more the Internet or the hard copy of the newspaper? And why?"

Student 1:

"Internet, because it was faster to get to different things."

Student 2:

"Internet, you could search for almost anything in there and get the information you needed."

Student 3:

"Newspaper, it was easier to find the information. I did better using the newspaper."

Student 4:

"Internet, there was more information on the Internet. I liked watching videos and doing stuff on it."

APPENDIX E

Quiz samples from the hard copy of the newspaper.

Name ______________________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Hard Copy

Dec. 4, 2001

Section A – Cover Section

Article "Arafat may find new predicament harder to survive"

1) Who is Israel's Prime Minister?
2) What is Arafat's nickname, and how old is he?

Section B – Money

Article "Firm cut backs on holiday parties, year-end bonuses"

1) What ex-professional boxer was mentioned in this article?
2) As a result of Sept. 11, instead of giving bonuses companies are spending their money how?

Section C – Sports

Article "Army-Navy game reunites wartime buddies"

1) What is Dustin Plumadore's father's name?
2) What was the score of the game? Who won?

Section D – Life

Article "Hyped invention just scoots along"

1) Who invented the Segway transporter?
2) How much will it cost?
3) How fast can the transporter travel?

Name _______________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Hard Copy

Dec. 11, 2001

Section A – Cover Section

Article "Russia still against missile tests"

1) Who are the two men pictured in the article, and what are their titles?
2) What is the ABM Treaty?

Section B – Money

Article "Car thefts rose 1.2% in 2000"

1) What are the top three cars stolen in the USA?
2) Why has car theft increased in 2000?

Section C – Sports

Article "No teams to fold until '03"

1) Who is Bud Selig?
2) Which two major league baseball teams will most likely be eliminated?

Section D – Life

Article "A Goldie opportunity to help"

1) What did Goldie claim is the most important part of her being?
2) Where did Goldie Hawn go to high school?

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Name ____________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Hard Copy

Dec. 18, 2001

Section A – Cover Section

Article "Bin Laden still missing; Omar reportedly fled to mountains"

1) Who is Omar? What is his full name?

2) Omar ordered a teenager to be hanged two weeks ago. How old was the teen?

3) Who is Stufflebeem?

Section B – Money

Article "Low mortgage rates energize Silicon Valley home sales"

1) What is a reasonable price range for houses in the Silicon Valley?

2) What is the median price of a home in Santa Clara County?

3) Why are houses selling better now?

Section C – Sports

Article "NFL: Iffy situation for finish"

1) Name 4 NFL teams are most likey to make the play offs?

2) Name the coach of the Denver Broncos?

Section D – Life

Article "Barrymore, Green end up in Splitsville"

1) Who filed for the divorce?

2) How many times have each been married?

3) What two significant events has the couple had to face since they started dating in March?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Name______________________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Hard Copy
Jan.8, 2002

Section A – Cover Section

Article "Can Hollywood handle the truth?"

1) On what basis is the ex-wife of the late Billy Tyne suing Warner Brothers, makers of the hit film *The Perfect Storm*?

2) Who was made the villain in *Titanic* but in real-life a hero?

Section B – Money

Article "Feds want airlines to explain flight delays"

1) Name the three categories the Department of Transportation has proposed requiring airlines to report delays.

2) Major airlines are required to report delays if the plane is how late?

Section C – Sports

Article "Weiss primed to climb from zero to hero."

1) Who is Weisiger and how long has she been acquainted with Weiss?

2) What is "erase your zeros?"

Section D – Life (eBriefing)

Article "Rings ratchets up movie – mistakes – site"

1) How many mistakes are there in the movie *Lord of the Rings*?

2) How many mistakes are there in the movie *Matrix*?

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APPENDIX F

Quiz samples from the Internet.

Name____________________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Internet

Dec. 4, 2001

Section A – Cover Section

Article "California man's capture as Taliban fighter stuns family"

1) What is the name of the California man who was captured fighting with the Taliban?

2) What book sparked his interest and development of Islam?

Section B – Money

Article "Coke has a smile about free ad deal linked to Olympic games"

1) How much does a 30 second commercial cost during the Olympics?

2) Where will the winter Olympics be held this year?

Section C – Sports

Article "Film renews Piccolo memories at Wake Forest"

1) What was the name of the movie this article was about?

2) Who died in this documentary movie and at what age?

Section D – Life

Article "Getting a read on U.S. teens"

1) What percentage of students in the US scored in the top 10% of the reading assessment worldwide?

2) What does OECD stand for?

Name ________________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Internet

Dec.11, 2001

Section A – Cover Section

Article "Marines block Kandahar"

1) What two places do US officials view as the most likely hiding spots for Osama bin Laden?
2) First battle casualty: who was killed and how?

Section B – Money

Article "Why do gas prices differ across the USA?"

1) What metro area has the highest gas average per gallon?
2) Minnesota tax on gasoline is how much per gallon?

Section C – Sports

Article "Forrest expects upper hand vs. Mosley"

1) When did Mosley and Forrest last fight? Who won that match?
2) When did Mosley last lose a fight?

Section D – Life

Article "Music of the Beatles come together on soundtracks"

1) What three upcoming films will Beatle's members' songs be featured in?
2) Who is going to do a remake of the Beatles song *You've Got to Hide Your Love Away*?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Name________________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Internet Site

Dec. 18, 2001

Section A – Cover Section

Article "Anthrax probably domestic – Investigators focus on US laboratories"

1) How many people have died so far from the anthrax mail attacks?
2) How does the FBI profile describe the possible culprit?
3) Who is the Health and Human Services Secretary?

Section B – Money

Article "Holiday shoppers stick to budgets"

1) How much is the average shopper's spending this Christmas season?
2) How much reduction is the Gap taking off its' inventory?
3) How long will K-Mart be open between Thursday and Dec.24?

Section C – Sports

Article "Boxing: controversy continues after Holyfield draw"

1) How old is Holyfield?
2) How did the three judges score the fight?

Section D – Life

Article "Dragonball Z is No. 1 with Lycos searchers"

1) What was last year's top search?
2) Three of the top ten searches were related to Sept. 11. Name them.
   1)
   2)
   3)
3) Finish the quote. "Every year the Internet is more and more __________ ___

___ _______ __ ___ ___________."

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Name_______________________

Capstone Project *USA Today* – Internet Site
Jan. 8, 2002

Section A- Cover Section

Article "Family, friends struggle to find reason for suicide crash"

1) Why did Julie Bishara change her name to Julie Bishop?

2) How many aircraft thefts were there last year?

Section B – Money

Article "Regulator's: Teen conned investors out of $1 million"

1) What is the age and name of the teen?

2) Last summer the teen had an interview with ESPN. The teen said he found more than a dozen of whose valuable trading card?

Section C – Sports

Article "Coaching carousel whirling"

1) Who is Steve Spurrier?

2) According to the article, who has been mentioned to replace Dennis Green as the head coach of the Minnesota Vikings?

Section D – Life

Article "Christmas cheer gone on 34th Street"

1) How much money did Secret Santa give to James Frazier?

2) How much more will Frazier be given?

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"What resource do you think you will be able to obtain information from more quickly and accurately the hard copy of the newspaper or the Internet?"

Hypothesis Student 1:

"I think I will be able to find the information faster on the Internet, because I won't have to turn the pages. I think I'll be more accurate with the hard copy of the newspaper, because when there is print the article might be more in depth and have more details."

Hypothesis Student 2:

"I think I can get information faster and more accurately from the Internet. This is because the Internet is unlimited in space. I also think the Internet is more orderly."

Hypothesis Student 3:

"I feel I will get information more quickly and accurately from the hard copy of the newspaper, because they have different sections. So, you know where to look. I think they put more details in the newspaper, too."

Hypothesis Student 4:

"I feel I will be able to access information more quickly and accurately from the Internet, because I think it will be quicker and easier."

WILL STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM SPENDING MORE CLASS TIME ON SPELLING AND SPENDING MORE CLASS TIME ON VARIED APPROACHES TO LEARNING SPELLING WORDS IN CLASS THROUGHOUT THE WEEK?

by

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B.A., Mankato State University, 1993

A capstone submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Winona State University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of

Master of Science

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This capstone entitled:

Will Students Benefit from Spending More Class Time on Spelling and Spending More Class Time on Varied Approaches to Learning Spelling Words in Class Throughout the Week?

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The final copy of this capstone has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Anderson, Jeffrey Michael (M.S., Education)

Will students benefit from spending more class time on spelling and spending more class time on varied approaches to learning spelling words in class throughout the week?

Capstone directed by Dr. Thomas Sherman

Abstract

I wanted to take it upon myself to find ways that would spark student interest in spelling words correctly and allow them to take some ownership and pride in spelling words the way they should be spelled. I also thought it was important to find a way to have the words that we learned to spell in class carry over so that correct spelling carries over to their daily work. I felt that without focus on spelling in my Language Arts class, students would neglect the art of spelling and go on to struggle with spelling words as they finish school and move on to adulthood. I convinced myself that as an educator it was my responsibility to try to change student beliefs and approaches to spelling words correctly in the things they do in life.

I had two Language Arts classes spend class time each week on various spelling activities. The spelling activities consisted of having the students make their own word lists, playing spelling bingo, students made their own spelling lists based on themes for the week, studying spelling lists with a buddy and finding spelling words in a word search, to name a few.

The students charted their pre-test and post-test results each week. The students also set weekly spelling goals and filled out a spelling survey and reflected in class how the spelling activities during the week had an impact on their final spelling test.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I give a pre-test and a post-test for spelling on a weekly basis and students don't seem to care about how they do on either test. No matter how much I stress spelling words correctly to classes that I teach students don't seem to care about spelling words correctly in their daily work, in special projects, or even in notes that they write to their friends. I have been frustrated with the lack of both effort and pride students take in spelling words correctly on spelling tests and by how often the students misspell words on assignments.

The Need for Study:

I wanted to take it upon myself to find ways that would spark student interest in spelling words correctly and allow them to take some ownership and pride in spelling words the way they should be spelled. I also thought it was important to find a way to have the words that we learned to spell in class carry over so that correct spelling carries over to their daily work. I felt that without focus on spelling in my Language Arts class, students would neglect the art of spelling and go on to struggle with spelling words as they finish school and move on to adulthood. I convinced myself that as an educator it was my responsibility to try to change student beliefs and approaches to spelling words correctly in the things they do in life.

Statement of the Problem:

The problem at hand is that students don't take spelling tests seriously enough. A large number of students are ill prepared for spelling tests and don't learn the intended words. Students do not carry spelling knowledge they have gained over to daily work or everyday life.

Statement of the Question:

Will students benefit from spending more class time on spelling and spending more class time on varied approaches to learning spelling words throughout the week?

Limitations of the Study:

There were several limitations to my study. One of the major limitations for the study was the level of difficulty of the words for the students taking the spelling tests. I had everyone in all my classes take the same list every week. Some of the words may have been too difficult for some students to learn, especially in a week's time. The difficulty of the words went hand-in-hand with another limitation: the ability levels of the students participating in the spelling tests. I had students of all academic levels working to improve their scores in spelling by participating in activities with one another, with expectations being the same for all. Students that may be at a higher academic level or a lower academic level, but yet were taking the same list of words were allotted the same amount of study time in class.

Time spent learning the words out of class also posed a limitation. The time spent in class may have been beneficial to the students that did better on their spelling, but those students may have put in additional time at home studying spelling, and as a result, the extra time in class may or may not have been the primary cause of improved spelling.

Another limitation of the study was how much interest or effort each student put in to doing better on spelling tests. There were students that had the intelligence to do better on spelling tests, but they didn't have any interest in doing better nor did they put forth the necessary effort to do better on tests. In addition, there were students that had a more difficult time with spelling and chose not to put the time or effort into doing better on the final test either. As a result, the students' attitudes and cooperation levels throughout the week played a major role in their performance on the final test at the end of each week.

A limitation that I didn't foresee was that the students wouldn't want to participate in the spelling activities we did or that the students wouldn't use their time in class to study spelling. I orchestrated several spelling activities with the classes along with extra time in class that the students were supposed to use to study their spelling lists that wasn't quite used by some of the students the way I had anticipated. I thought all students were going to jump at the opportunity to play games and win prizes by participating in spelling activities. Unfortunately, not everyone was as excited about improving spelling as I was. Also, students wasted time in class getting their list out or found other ways to waste time in class before studying their lists, so the amount of time used was less for the students that were less organized.

In addition, students that were absent on the days we spent time studying spelling did not have as much time to study spelling. There were enough students involved with the study that it didn't matter. The number of tests that were given was large enough that missing a test or two didn't make an impact on an individual basis or the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

After reading several resources on spelling, I have come to the conclusion that directly teaching spelling in class as well as allowing students time to study spelling in class is very important. Several of the materials that I read reinforced some of the beliefs that I had about teachers and students and their roles in teaching or learning. For example, the article "The Impact of Mnemonic Strategies" supported my ideas of spelling and introduced me to several new ideas on teaching spelling. I gained a new outlook on some strategies that go along with spelling.

One of the strategies that were introduced was how teachers need to help students to develop their own memory system. Dr. Joel Levin states, " It's our emotional system that drives our attentional system. This system drives learning and memory"(Levin, 1994). After reading about that, I watched the students in class that did poorly on their spelling lists and had behavioral issues in school. I found students labeled with emotional problems (Educational Behavior Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder) were more likely to struggle with spelling. It was a challenge for me to get the students with these problems to focus on spelling during the allotted time and to make it a goal to do well on the final test at the end of the week.

Another activity that was mentioned in my research that turned out to be a helpful tool in teaching spelling was to stress to the students to "find familiar words within spelling words". For example, "believe has the word 'lie' in it"(Levin, 1994). In addition to finding words within words, I discovered the methods of teaching spelling by syllables and reviewing, reciting and writing words from the same literature.

Some other concepts that I was introduced to from the same resource were "to chart or graph the pre-test and post-test scores and to set goals for the final test, that a daily period of teacher-directed spelling activity based on meaningful content will greatly enhance student proficiency in spelling, the most productive spelling lists feature developmentally-appropriate words based on the highest frequency in writing, and the most effective educational programs are built around the learning model 'test-study-test'" (Levin,1994).

A few additional strategies that I discovered while reading "The Impact of Mnemonic Strategies On Memory of Spelling Words" were "well-designed learning games serve to motivate student interest and lead to spelling independence, self-correcting pretests is an essential strategy for spelling mastery, and frequent opportunities to use spelling words in everyday writing contribute significantly to the maintenance spelling ability" (Levin, 1994).

"A Student-Active Learning Approach to Spelling Instruction", by Jerry Zutell was also useful literature. Zutell stated, " A strong language and literature-based reading program and a greater emphasis on the writing process do greatly aid students' literacy learning, they are often not sufficient to successfully teach spelling skills and strategies" (Zutell, 1996). The point I like to stress in my teaching is that reading, writing and spelling are all connected.

I particularly liked the section where Zutell mentioned how important proficient spelling is. A reason he gave, which information I shared with my classes, was: "It is a courtesy to the reader and an aid to communication when words are spelled correctly, a misspelled word can actually change the meaning of a text and lead to serious miscommunication, misspellings are a distraction to the reader; drawing attention away from the meaning, and possibly lowering the credibility of the writer, and good spelling ability also aids the writer because a fluent speller can concentrate more fully on the message she or he wants to convey" (Zutell, 1996). I think some students saw spelling in a new light after thinking about his opinion on spelling and how it makes a difference in the world.

While drawing from the same article selection, I found another piece of information in the same article that I found useful. "Good spellers recognize differences and similarities between words" (Zutell, 1996) is something I never pieced together in my mind. After thinking about it, I found a lot of truth to what Zutell was saying. I began thinking about all of the students in my classes that were good spellers and came to the conclusion that many of them were good problem solvers and saw how they applied problem-solving skills to recognizing similarities and differences between words.

The best information I read in the article was "Learning must be student-active. They should relate what they are learning to their own experiences and activities" (Zutell, 1996). For a while I made it a focus to empower the students to make their own spelling lists and to make up a pre-test and a final weekly so they could test out on words that they are struggling with. I found this to be a great way to get the students to take ownership in their schoolwork. Some students explored new vocabulary, while other students put words on their lists that they had difficulty spelling.

The article that I read referred to the students developing their own list of words as "Word Hunting" (Zutell, 1996). This process allowed the students to be active in finding words that they wanted or needed to learn how to spell. "It gives students a sense of ownership and decision-making about their learning" (Zutell, 1996). Word hunting can be as easy as allowing students to choose a few words to study each week, or it can be used to focus on a particular spelling pattern or strategy. I liked to have the students pick out a theme and make a list accordingly. I sometimes went on a word hunt of my own to make a list for the students by reading through their text and devising a list from the words that were in the short stories that we read in class.

Another helpful activity that I discovered by reading this article was to have the students actively engage in "Word Sorting" (Zutell, 1996). "Word sorting helps students notice important features of words being studied, and it can contribute significantly to students' proofreading abilities" (Zutell, 1996). Basically, what I had the students do was write their words on note cards. I had the students sort their list of words by word pronunciation, letter pattern, or by meaning and spelling. "In order to sort successfully, students must focus not individually on pronunciation, pattern, or meaning, but on the connections between each of these specific spellings" (Zutell, 1996).

The same article mentioned the possibility of having the students become active spellers by incorporating the spelling list into games. This could be done by having the students spell a word correctly before making a move on the game. The article mentioned three important advantages to combining spelling with games: "1) they keep student interest high, 2) they allow students to compete on equal footing with less able and more able spellers (each student works with his or her own stack of spelling cards), and 3) since players are responsible for checking the accuracy of their opponents' spelling, games engage students in examining a wide variety of words and spellings" (Zutell, 1996).

Peer testing was another way that I had the students study spelling and was reinforced as being a good idea by the article. One tidbit I grabbed from the reading was that "peer testing" could help the students become more familiar with the test itself. This approach came in handy because I dealt with many students that expressed to me that they suffered from test anxiety.

Finally, an approach that was also mentioned in the article was having the students keep a word journal or a word study notebook. I thought it was a great idea for the students to come up with their own list of words that they had to master. I had students document words that they knew they had problems spelling and also had them add words to their lists that they misspelled from previous spelling tests or assignments that were handed back. I had the students keep their word list in alphabetical order for easy access and organizational purposes.

Another article I used on my research was entitled "Self-Regulated Learning in Spelling", by Karen R. Harris and Steve Graham. I learned that "self-regulated learners set goals for themselves and then independently plan, manage, and evaluate what it takes to reach their goals"(Harris and Graham, 1996). I tried to carry this idea over into my classrooms by introducing the students to setting goals for their spelling tests on a weekly basis. Each student needed to create a goal of how many words they would get right on their spelling test each week and write a plan on how they were going to try to achieve the goal. Most of the students made it a goal to use class time more wisely by setting aside a few minutes throughout the week to practice spelling their words or by pairing up with a buddy and give each other the spelling test. I stressed to the students that it was their responsibility to make time and dedicate a few extra moments throughout the week to learn their spelling words. We discussed how being independent learners gave people better chances of doing well in school, simply by taking ownership in the work that they do. "The same self-regulation strategies that put them in control of their writing can help them to take ownership of the process of learning to spell" (Harris and Graham, 1996).

The article stressed that it is important for the students to develop a spelling consciousness and with that they will become better spellers. One of the approaches that was suggested and that I did in class was to have classes go on a "Word Hunt". Each student made a word journal of words that they have difficulty spelling or words that they have misspelled on spelling tests or words they misspelled on an assignment. The students kept the list in alphabetical order and continued to build the list as the year went on. The students created their own resource of words that they had a hard time spelling. I also chose words to share with the students to put on their lists to build their spelling books. I gave students words off a high-frequency list and they entered the words that they misspelled from that list into their books. I found it important for the students to attempt to master spelling words that they used frequently. "Mastery of 850 to 1000 basic spelling words during the elementary grades provides students with a spelling vocabulary of up to 89% of the words they commonly use in their writing, including frequently misspelled words and spelling demons"(Harris and Graham, 1996). Writing assignments proved to be the best resource for the words that the students needed to master and put on their lists because they could see for themselves certain words that they struggled to spell correctly and chose to use in their own writing.

At the end of each week, the students briefly reflected on their goals and whether or not they stuck to their plan. I had the students write about the time they spent on spelling and if they fulfilled their goal for the week. I also had the students write about what they liked about the goals they chose and what they would change for the next list. "With the self-regulated approach to spelling, they come to understand not only the spelling process but themselves as spellers" (Harris and Graham, 1996).

"Five Questions Teachers Ask About Spelling", by Richard Gentry answered many of the questions I have often asked myself about spelling. One of the interesting points the article explained was that "In places where teachers stopped paying attention to spelling, test scores dropped and schools began to experience failure with literacy education" (Gentry, 1996). I can say from my own experience that the moment I stopped having spelling tests in school, I lost interest in the importance of spelling words correctly on assignments. I felt that since the teachers didn't care about our spelling enough to give us a spelling test, why should I care if I continue to spell words correctly?

This article reinforced what I have believed for the five years that I have been teaching: there is no one, simple way to teach spelling. "I believe that teaching spelling is something that can be best accomplished gradually, step-by-step, day-by-day, year-by-year, based on substance and process" (Gentry, 1996). The bottom line is that people need to continue to connect spelling to reading and writing, and attempt to build better approaches to spelling in the students.

The topic of using a set curriculum for spelling was mentioned in the article. The conclusion that was drawn was curriculum for beginning teachers may be a good thing but the more experienced teachers have had time to develop their own way of teaching spelling by drawing from many resources. Another message from the article was that no matter how spelling is taught, students should continue to be good readers and writers.

CHAPTER III

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Participants:

I had four Language Arts classes with which to conduct my classroom work. Each class consisted of close to thirty-one students. I had approximately thirty-eight minutes per class period to use for lessons. Every Monday I gave a pre-test in spelling and every Friday I gave a final spelling test. I allowed two classes to have class time to participate in spelling activities throughout the week, approximately twenty extra minutes a week, and the other two classes were not allowed any extra time in class to prepare for the final test on Friday. The two classes that I had spend time on spelling in class throughout the year weren't allowed time to spend on spelling activities for the first four weeks of class in order to be able to tell if the time spent in class made a difference on their final test. The two classes that were allowed extra time to spend on spelling activities set spelling goals for the week and graphed their test scores on a weekly basis. The two classes that were not allowed extra time in class to spend on spelling activities did not set goals but did graph their spelling progress. Some of the extra spelling activities throughout the weeks included: spelling bingo, writing spelling words on note cards and hanging the cards in the room, completing word searches and word scrambles, playing hangman, peer testing, individual spelling time and making a spelling book of words that each student had difficulty spelling.

Procedures:

I collected three types of data from the students. I collected student surveys, student graphs and student goals for the week. Certain types of data were collected weekly, while other types of data were collected after a few weeks.

I collected the student goal sheets (see Appendix A) on a weekly basis. I reviewed the students' goals with them and asked each student if their goals were met for the week. If the goals were met, we discussed what the student did to attain the goals. If the goals were not met, we looked at the past week and tried to figure out what the student was going to do differently the following week to better achieve the goals. Throughout the weeks there was a "bucking bronco" or two in the bunch that refused to put in the time or the effort to achieve his or her goals. I thought that reviewing each student's goals was a positive way to show the students that I cared about their progress in spelling and that they should too. I think this source of data directly related to the research topic because it required the students to reflect on the time they spent on studying spelling and how it altered their scores, if at all.

The second type of data that I collected, the surveys (see Appendices B and C), was collected throughout the semester. I had the students fill out surveys on the spelling activities that we did in class every couple of weeks or so. I would gather the information on how the students felt the activities helped them on their final tests. The feedback from the students was used to determine if we would spend time on that particular spelling activity again. This source of data related to my research topic by giving me confidential feedback on how each student felt about the time we spent in class on spelling activities. The students were not required to put their names on their surveys to insure more honest comments on the spelling activities.

Thirdly, I had the students fill in a graph to chart their scores on the pre-test and final test at the beginning and end of each week. This source of data related to my study by showing me how the students did on their pre-tests and final tests before and after we started spending extra time in class with spelling activities (see Appendices D, E and F). I was able to judge the relationship spending time in class on spelling had on their test scores by comparing the difference in final test scores from the beginning of the year when we didn't spend time in class on spelling activities to the end of the period when we did spend time in class on spelling activities and by calculating the average margin of improvement from one approach to the other.

Data Collection Tools:

In my opinion, the data that most directly impacted the results of the study came from the surveys and questions in class that I had my students answer. I believed that the students' feedback was the most accurate due to the fact that most of my students were brutally honest regarding their opinions on the study I was conducting. I thought that the data I received from the students fit the topic the best because the students know the impact that spending time in class had on their results on the spelling test. I thought the students I surveyed were able to give me an accurate assessment on how the time spent in class on spelling activities benefited them on the final exam. I also discovered that the students were open minded about sharing their true feelings on how extra time assisted them in doing better as an end result. The students that didn't have extra time in class for spelling activities weren't able to give me as accurate of an answer because they were only able to speculate on how the extra time spent in class would have helped them perform on the final test. Overall, the students answering survey questions about the time they spent on spelling and contributing to class discussions about the spelling activities had nothing to lose by speaking freely about their opinions about the process, and the names on the surveys I gave them were withheld.

Another tool used to collect data were the graphs the students created that charted weekly spelling test results. The students filled in a graph after each final test to show their test results. I had the students fill in the graph before they spent time in class on spelling to compare it to the weeks they were allowed to spend time on tests in class. In the end, we were able to look at the two time periods orally in class and draw a conclusion on how spending additional time in class on spelling helped or didn't help their final spelling test results.

A third tool used to collect data was information gathered from the students about the goals they were setting each week and if they were being met. If the students were setting a goal to do better each week than they did before they had class time to study spelling, I knew that spending time in class on spelling could have been a direct result, if the students' scores went up. This particular data fit the problem because the students immediately knew if their goal was met for the week and if the time they spent during the week paid off. Also, depending on the lists, the students made goals that allowed them to get "certain words" right on the final and devoted their class time to learning those words.

After taking all of the types of data collected into consideration, I am convinced that the data accurately measured what I wanted it to measure because the students were open and honest about their feedback, the graphs showed progress for the students from the time they didn't spend extra minutes in class on spelling to the time they did spend extra time in class on spelling and the students reflected in class discussions that they felt that the extra time in class was part of their success, and the students set realistic, simple goals for the week and were able to attain them by targeting certain words for the final tests on Fridays.

Potential sources of bias that could be identified in the procedures used were some students weren't actually using their class time wisely and for some reason or another, did well on the test anyway, the list for the week could have been particularly easy for some students which in turn could have led to a better test score, the students may have been sharing false information about their true feelings about how they thought time benefited them to make me feel good about result of them spending time on spelling in class or to get more time in class the next week to "waste", the students could have been cheating on the final exam or intentionally doing poorly on the pre-test to make it look like they showed progress at the end of the week and some students chose "easy" words when they had the opportunity to build their own spelling list for the week.

Potential sources of bias that were identified on the tools used were survey and class discussion questions weren't answered as honestly as I hoped by some, some graphs weren't filled out to reflect the final test result for some students, and students may not have actually achieved their goals for the week when they said they had.

After looking at all of the details of my study, I thought the information I gathered was convincing. The feedback I received from the students was accurate enough on a large scale and that the end result was, for most, spending additional time in class on spelling will help students on the final test. I collected enough data to support a general population that stated additional class time was helpful to most.

The graphs that were accurately filled out show that there was a significant amount of improvement on students' final tests after spending more time in class to prepare for the final. The goal sheets that the students filled out and reflected on and the surveys filled out by individuals contain information that would per sway an educator to believe that the additional time spent in class did make a difference in the scores at the end of the week.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Process:

I began analyzing the data by separating all three types of data into different piles. I looked at the student surveys and made notes on which activities we did each week that were useful to the students. After I concluded which activities the students voted as the most beneficial I recorded the information in a notebook so other classes can participate in such activities in the future. I did discard some of the surveys once in a while for being too vague or so sloppy that I couldn't make any sense out of them. I thought the student feedback I received was quite accurate just by the way the students commented in class. By this I mean that the students were pretty open and honest about their feelings on how the spelling worked. The students weren't required to put their names on their surveys, but some students chose to. I was able to get a better analogy of the feedback when the students put their names on the surveys because I had a better idea if the student filling out the survey was sincere. However, with taking in so many surveys from the students I was able to get an accurate count on the overall opinions of the questions.

Analyzing, the student goals information was pretty cut and dry. I had the students write down their goals and the students and I discussed if he/she thought they achieved their goal due to the time spent in class on spelling. I could get a good read on the students and how they actually thought the goal setting was helping them. Most of the goals had something to do with getting a certain percent on their final test or simply spending a specific amount of time studying spelling for the week. The information I gathered was pretty simple, yet beneficial. The students confessed that they either met their goal for the week or not and what they could change for the following week. After briefing each student, I decided whether or not that child had a good grasp of his or her own self-evaluation and time management skills and where I needed to go with the gathered information as a professional. Discussing the goals with each student provided me the opportunity to talk one-on-one with certain individuals that needed a bit more guidance on how to study words, spend their time more wisely, or simply set more realistic goals or make adjustments to their study habits.

I was glad I had the students make a graph of their progress on pre-tests and post-tests. The students and I could clearly see how they improved or didn't improve from pre-test to post-test by looking at their graphs. I had the students calculate their average margin of improvement after spending more time in class with spelling words for the week. We also compared the graphs we made earlier in the year when we weren't spending any additional time in class on spelling. The students were able to see for themselves the improvement in their scores after spending more time in class on spelling.

Results:

I think the three sources of data were important in their own way, yet tied together at the same time. I would compare the three techniques I used by saying that they all played off each other. The goals the students set at the beginning of the week led to seeing positive results in their final spelling lists, the graphs that they filled in showed that they were making positive gains from pretest to final and from week to week steady improvement by participating in activities in spelling, and their surveys reflected their change in attitude on spelling and the efforts they were putting into spelling. An unexplained negative result of the data left me in question as to whether every student put forth his/her complete effort into doing well on spelling.

Two of the three sources of data required student input. I think students were more likely to be involved in activities when they had some say. Comparatively speaking, the surveys and the goals were similar because the students were able to express themselves and make changes by voicing their opinions. I thought the students took more ownership in the study by being able to share their thoughts and have an impact.

When analyzing my data I did take into account that some students have a bad attitude about school or don't want to participate in studies. I think the overall population of the study overwhelmed the students that were negative throughout the study, and as a result, the few "bad apples" didn't change the end results. There were some students that didn't turn in surveys or didn't ever reach their goals, but needless to say, the study went on!

The data tells me about my question that additional time in class does warrant better results on tests at the end of the week. It also tells me that adding various approaches to teaching spelling helps the students do better on tests at the end of the week. By looking at the graphs my students made, one can clearly see that there is a difference between the results if students spend time in the classroom during the week compared to the results if students do not spend class time during the week.

I think I gathered enough information to draw a conclusion on my study, as a result, I can say that my data collection tools were an effective way to collect data. The surveys I collected from the students, the graphs the students charted their progress with and the goals each student set for the week provided the students, as well as myself with an adequate amount of information.

I think the way I went about collecting data turned out to be a good way of doing things. Collecting and reviewing goals on a weekly basis, having the students fill out surveys once in a while and monitoring graphs of student progress were ways of collecting data that I would recommend to anyone else that would decide to do a similar project or if someone needs to make an adjustment with spelling lessons in the classroom.

There were a few things my data told me about my students. One thing I learned from my data was my students were very cooperative individuals. They were open to new ideas and tried different activities with spelling.

The data also showed me that my students weren't getting the most out of their spelling ability. I was able to point out each week how spending more time helped certain individuals on spelling by reviewing the data I collected with the students.

The data also reinforced that my students could evaluate their study habits well and become good problem solvers by setting goals and achieving them. The data sold me on the fact that many students needed to have a purpose for learning and that being goal oriented was a good approach to learning.

I was surprised how my students took ownership in spending more time on their spelling lists in class and how some of the students were anxious to get a spelling list every week. I thought incorporating activities that went along with the lesson gave spelling a purpose for the week and allowed the students some ownership in their learning. The students were surprised they could set goals and stick to them. Also, after seeing the progress the students had made, they became more aware that hard work or at least a little more effort makes a big difference.

I know my study was on time spent in class, but I think I would be interested to discover how additional time spent in class combines with time spent out of class. Would it be counterproductive to encourage the students to spend just as much time at home with the spelling words on a weekly basis as we did in class? Will spending additional time at home burn a student out on spelling? How much anxiety was involved with pressure that parents or even students put on themselves to do well on spelling? Does parent involvement have anything to do with the effort students put forth for spelling?

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Action Plan:

After completing my research and conducting my study in class I drew a few conclusions by reflecting over the past few months of the study. I think that spelling should be more of a focus in the classroom and that teachers should provide time to study spelling in class along with various ways of teaching spelling just like any other subject. Teachers need to role model a positive attitude toward spelling and continuously check for students' spelling mistakes in their daily work and find ways to help the students correct their poor spelling habits.

My opinion changed about spelling after reading several professional's opinions on spelling and after I watched the students improve their spelling scores by spending more time and dedication to the art of spelling. The information I gathered for my study had an impact on my approach to teaching spelling and how to set goals and better track the progress of my students and to find ways to adjust students' study habits. I feel that I had a big part in the students changing their attitudes toward spelling by always stressing how important spelling is to people and by reinforcing that philosophy by allotting the students time in class throughout the week to focus on their spelling lists.

I will continue to give the students time in class to spend on their spelling lists each week. In doing so, I will continue to gather student input on the different ways they want to approach spelling lists and I will continue to vary the spelling activities weekly.

In addition, I will also continue to have the students chart their progress and set goals to better their education.

The only thing I could see myself change in my new found spelling curriculum is to make two different spelling lists each week for two different ability levels. I think some of the students are at a disadvantage when teachers choose the words for the spelling test because the words may be too challenging. With that being said, I want to continue to challenge the students that are more gifted in spelling and make spelling worthwhile for all levels of learners.

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APPENDIX A

A spelling survey filled out by the students.

BE HONEST

1. How much time during the week do you study spelling?

2. Do you dread spelling tests? Rate 1-10

3. Do you feel that you gain anything by taking spelling tests? Rate: 1-10

4. Do you feel that spelling tests increase your vocabulary? Rate 1-10

5. Do you think spending a few more minutes in class each week will help your spelling scores improve?

6. Do you feel that your scores may improve if you were able to choose your spelling words?

7. Feel free to write additional comments.

APPENDIX B

A spelling survey filled out by the students.

Spelling

1. How much time per week did you spend on studying spelling?

2. Do you think it was helpful in class to spend time with the spelling words?

3. If it wasn't for doing activities in class with spelling words, would you have looked at the list before the final test?

4. Did your vocabulary increase because of the spelling lists? Explain.

5. Was it beneficial for you to create your own list? How?

6. Why did your scores increase/decrease once you began creating your own list?

7. What method did you find helpful to study your words? (You may include at home and/or school methods.)

8. What suggestions would you have for next year's students regarding spelling?

9. What suggestions do you have for me? (Were ten words enough or not enough?)

10. Was it helpful to use a theme once in a while for the list?

11. Would you rather I picked the list or left it up to you? Why?

12. What other creative ways to give spelling lists might you suggest?

13. Did you dread spelling less first semester or second semester? Explain.

14. Did the different methods of spelling lists make spelling more or less painful? Explain.

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APPENDIX C

A spelling goal sheet students filled out weekly.

SPELLING GOALS

MY GOAL IS TO SPEND ________ MINUTES IN CLASS ON SPELLING DURING THE WEEK.

WAS THIS GOAL MET? YES NO

COMMENTS:

MY GOAL IS TO SPELL AT LEAST __________PERCENT OF THE WORDS CORRECTLY ON THE FINAL TEST.

WAS THIS GOAL MET? YES NO

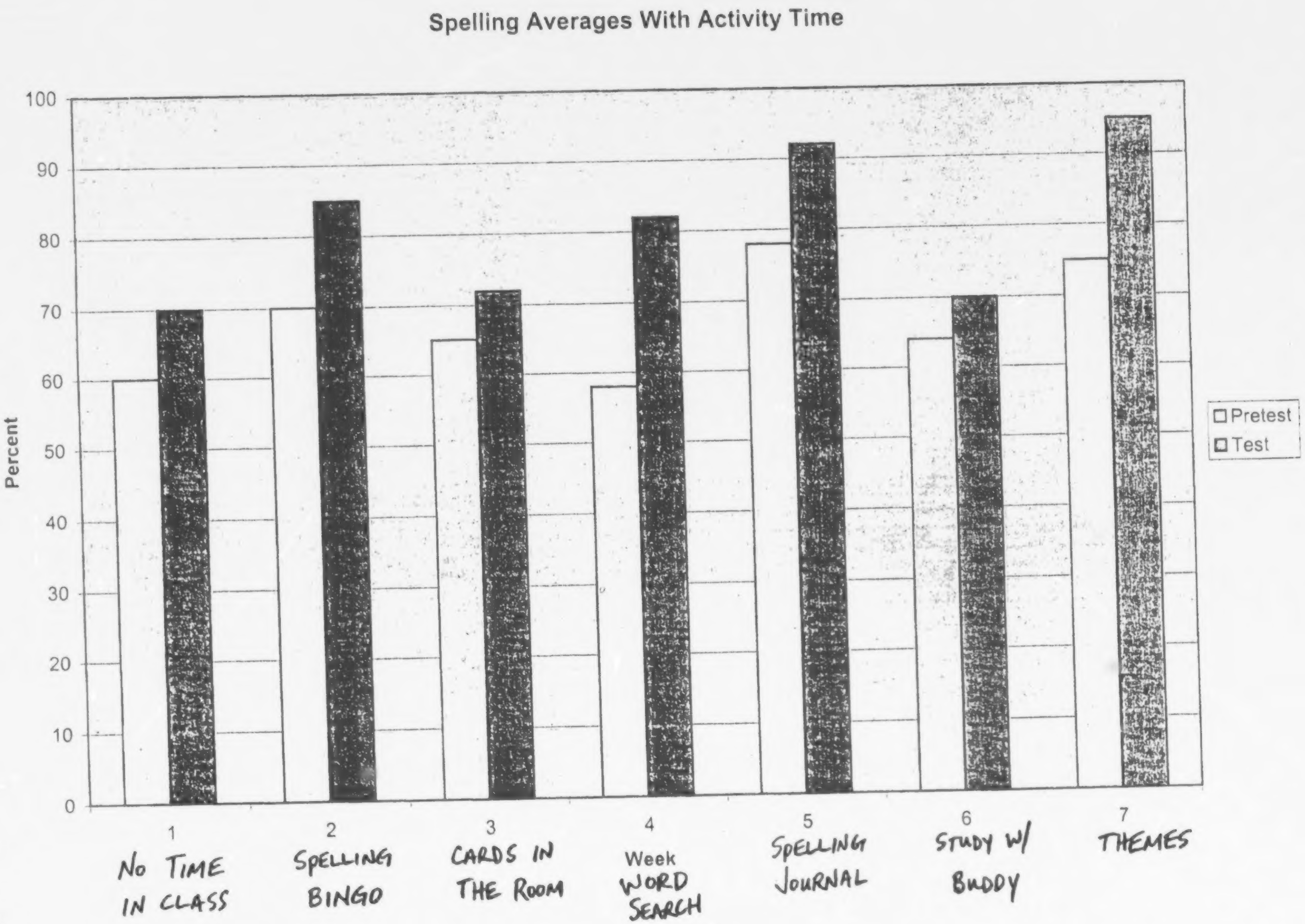
COMMENTS:

OTHER SPELLING GOALS FOR THE WEEK:

COMMENTS:

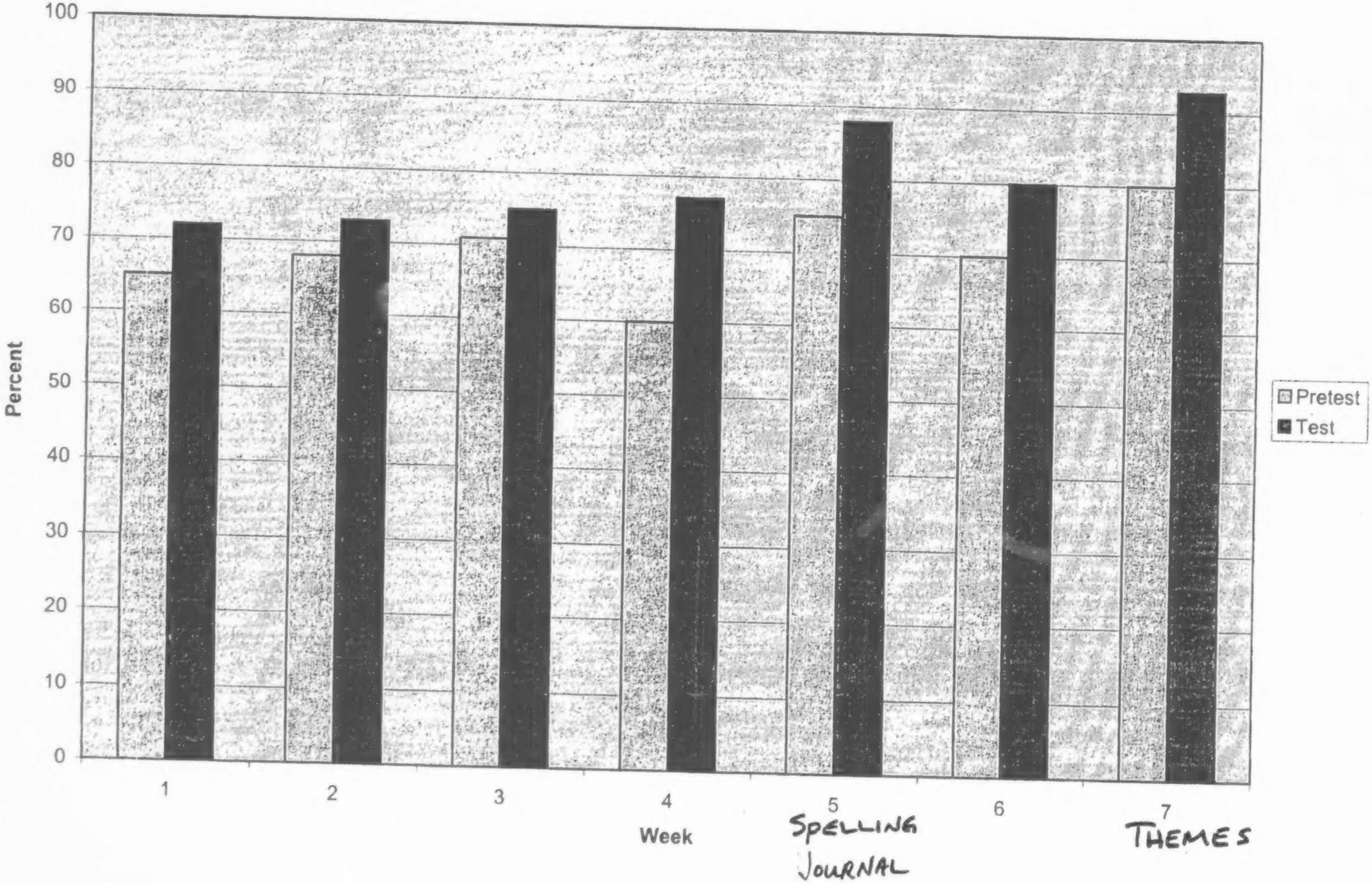
APPENDIX D

Spelling averages with spelling activity time.


Spelling Averages With Activity Time
Percent
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1
No TIME IN CLASS
2
SPELLING BINGO
3
CARDS IN THE ROOM
4
Week WORD SEARCH
5
SPELLING JOURNAL
6
STUDY W/ BUDDY
7
THEMES
☐ Pretest
▨ Test

APPENDIX E

Spelling averages without spelling activity time.

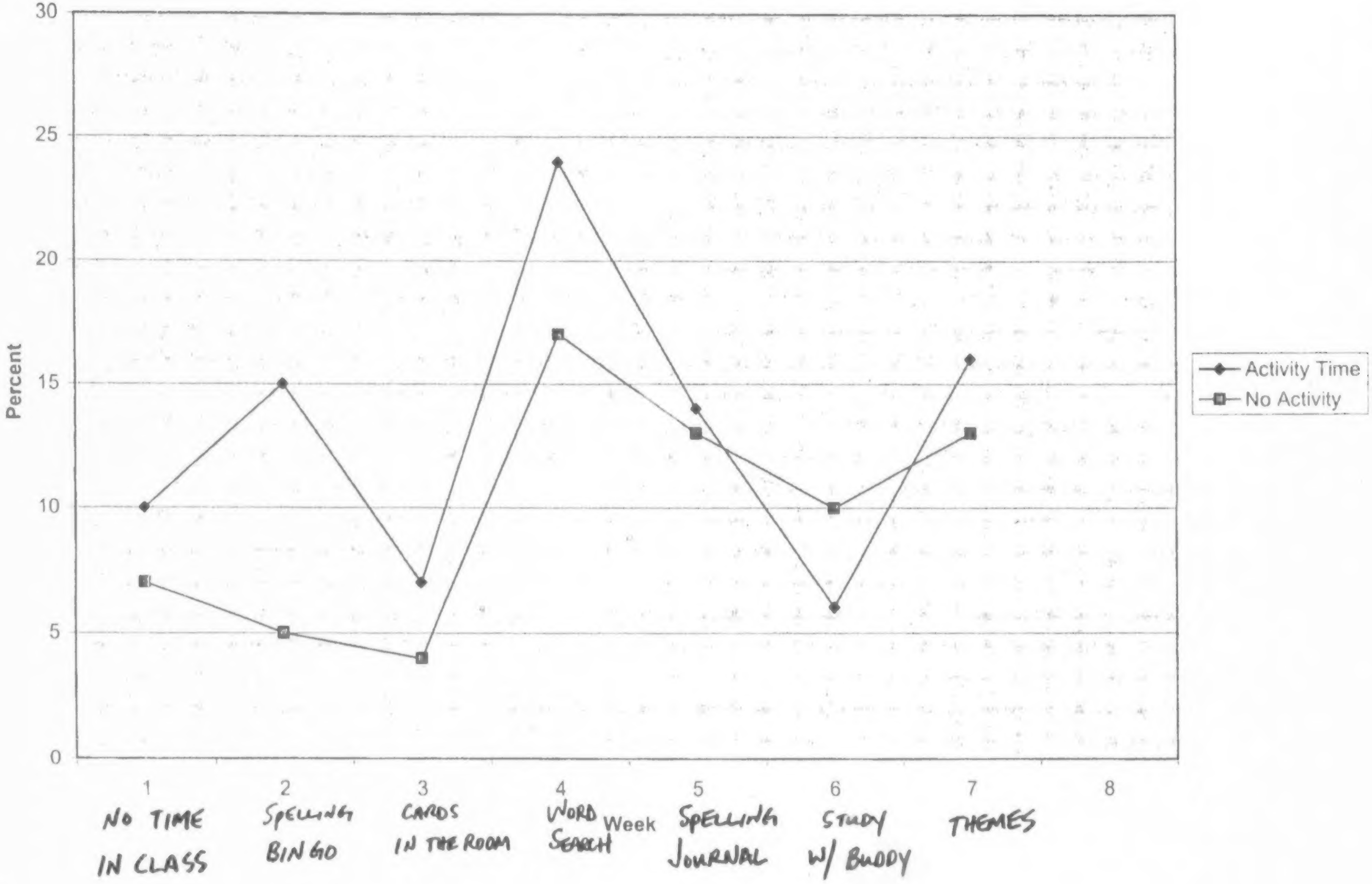


Spelling Averages Without Activity Time

APPENDIX F

A percent increase in spelling comparison.

Percent Increase Comparison



The Graduate School
Of
Winona State University

Using an Author's Chair in a Kindergarten Classroom

By

Tara Bradford

Bachelor's of Arts, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 1999

A capstone submitted to the

faculty of

Winona State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Education

December 2002

This capstone entitled:

Using the Author's Chair in a Kindergarten Classroom to increase independent reading and writing.

Written by Tara Bradford

Has been approved by the Department of Education

Facilitator's Signature:

Thomas L. Sherman
Thomas Sherman

The final copy of this capstone has been examined by the signatories,

and we find that both the content and the form

meet the acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work

in the above mentioned discipline

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Abstract

Bradford, Tara (B.S., Education)

Using an Author's Chair in a Kindergarten Classroom to increase independent reading and writing.

Capstone directed by Facilitating Professor Thomas Sherman and Advisory Committee.

The author's chair is simply a place from which a story is read. Throughout this capstone I will describe the various aspects of the author's chair. I elaborate on the multiple benefits of using an author's chair in an elementary classroom. I also describe the process of implementing an author's chair into an elementary classroom.

This capstone begins by describing how I implemented the author's chair in my kindergarten classroom of eighteen students. I show what type of data collection tools I used and the results from that data.

I reflect on how the data I collected related to the topic of using the author's chair in a kindergarten classroom and I question any potential sources of bias involved in my procedures and data collection tools.

I collected my data at two different times, once before implementing an author's chair in my classroom and once after using an author's chair for a period of one month.

I elaborate on the process of my data collection and then share the results from the data, which is presented through the use of three graphs. This gave me solid data on which I made my conclusions.

Completing this research has motivated me to further explore questions related to the author's chair. I finish this thesis with the conclusions I made from the data results and discuss how I plan to continue the use of the author's chair with another class. I will this capstone questioning how my research will effect other teachers and their practices.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to

my husband, Mike

and

my daughter, Morgan

You bring smiles to my face so easily.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction / background:

I chose this particular topic because I wanted to find a way to increase my students' interest in the writing and reading centers. During my student teaching experiences, I used the author's chair to engage students in writing activities. The students really enjoyed the opportunity to share what they had written. Implementing the author's chair takes a great deal of time and organization; therefore I felt the need to know if having an author's chair is beneficial to the students.

Need for study:

My students were not choosing to use the reading and writing centers during free choice time. If more of an interest were found in these centers, I would continue to use the author's chair. I wanted to know if the students' attitudes towards reading and writing changed with the use of the author's chair.

Statement of the problem:

Students in my classroom were not choosing to use the library or the writing center during free choice time.

Statement of the question / hypothesis:

Will creating an author's chair increase independent student reading and writing during free choice time?

I tracked the students' interest by counting how many students use each center every day. I conducted a student opinion survey before and after using the author's chair to determine if students' attitudes on reading and math have changed.

Definition of terms:

Author's Chair: Students create a piece of writing to share with the class while sitting in the special chair designated for authors. This piece may include pictures, words or both. When the students are finished sharing, classmates compliment the author on their work. I will be choosing four authors a week to share their work with the rest of the class.

Free Choice: A period of time during the day that students can choose to manipulate items in the room such as blocks, paints, playdough and many others. Students may also choose the writing center or the library.

Reading Center: Our classroom library.

Writing Center: An area that includes writing utensils such as markers, crayons, pens, and pencils. It also includes blank paper, construction paper, stapled books with words (see Appendix A) and stapled books without words.

Limitations of the study:

I thought some of my students would thrive on this type of attention while others would be hesitant. The relationship the student had with others in the class and student ability has been limitations.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Before I approach the question of how using an author's chair in a kindergarten classroom will increase independent reading and writing, I will define an author's chair.

Through all of the articles I have read, the same two names keep surfacing when the term "Author's Chair" is brought up; Don Graves and Jane Hansen. They were the first people to define the author's chair as "where the reader sits"(Graves & Hansen 1983). Under their definition, the reader is anyone who is reading, not necessarily the author of the story. Using Graves and Hansen's definition, Karelitz (1993) felt that "A child who signs up to read can read her own writing, the published writing of a classmate, or a trade book written by an adult."

Karelitz (1993) also saw the author's chair as a way to spotlight the children's reading and writing accomplishments, a celebration of sorts. She felt that using an author's chair was a form of publication. The students "go public" with their reading achievement.

Another aspect of the author's chair emerged as an opportunity for the writer to hear feedback on his or her writing from a group of peers (Tierney, Readence, & Dishner 1990).

The Saskatchewan Curriculum and Instruction Branch (1992) believes the purpose of the author's chair was to develop the students' sense of being an author and to emphasize that a student's ideas and experiences are worth sharing and writing down.

I believe, along with many of the authors, that the meaning of an author's chair goes much deeper than just a place to sit and read. There are numerous experiences and benefits that go hand in hand with using an author's chair in your classroom. The major benefits include environment, writing, reading and audience participation.

When an author's chair is used in the classroom a certain type of environment is created. Karelitz(1993) felt that the author's chair provided experiences that are crucial for building a community of learners and readers. Simic (1993) states, "A cooperative and caring environment that invites children to share and respond is the type of supportive environment in which children's reading and writing can flourish."

What I feel to be the most important benefit of using an author's chair is writing. For students to succeed and feel confident it is necessary for them to start writing at their own developmentally appropriate level(Johnson 1999). Johnson (1999) reminds teachers that dictation, scribbling, drawing, and temporary spelling are necessary to early writing development. This helps the student realize that writing is very important. Johnson (1999)also defines the seven stages of writing.

1. The child scribbles.
2. The child writes with curvy lines, cursive m's, and a series of small circles and vertical lines.
3. The child uses random letters to indicate words. The child has little or no knowledge of the alphabet.
4. Tracing, copying and using mock letter and symbols. Child divides words at any point, changes direction of writing and reverses letters that he knows.
5. Random lettering, listing key words. Temporary spelling and invented spelling is used.
6. More alphabet letters and the child starts to use vowels. Temporary spelling becomes closer to standard spelling.
7. The child mostly uses conventional spelling.

Johnson (1999) views writing as a way for children to communicate more effectively and rapidly. She also feels that writing forces children to think, something they sometimes resist. Assigning writing topics can hinder this thinking. Johnson quotes Donald Graves, "When we consistently assign writing topics, we place our students on a sort of writing welfare system".

Grave & Hansen (1983) and Tierney, Readence & Dischner (1990) all agree that when a child writes and reads his work he realizes that he has choices to make as an author. This practice also gives the author confidence in his own writing abilities.

Reading is another major benefit to using an author's chair. Karelitz (1993) sees reading to the class as an event that benefits writing, reading and speaking. She also feels that reading to the class gives the student motivation to do his best. It is more effective than any test or drill she would give him on his reading skills.

The last benefit is audience participation. The students learn how to be good audience members, which involves more than just listening. The audience needs to be able to respond by asking good questions and giving positive feedback (Karelitz 1993 and Saskatchewan 1992). Using an author's chair provided every child with the opportunity to participate in reading, writing and listening (Karelitz 1993).

Many authors agree on the benefits of an author's chair, but they see it being used in various ways. Labbo, Hoffman & Roser (1995) feel that one of the biggest mistakes is making a student participate in the author's chair. They feel it should be the students' choice as to when they want to read. Karlitz(1993) however, chose one author every week. Some people feel that the author's work should be in the final draft while others feel that the author's chair is better used as a time for the students to conference with their peers (Tierney, Readence & Dischner 1990). Again there is discrepancy in how the audience should react, with applause and compliments, or with respectful questions (Johnson 1990). The author's agree that when using the author's chair in your classroom, it needs to provide the author with a sense of accomplishment and pride.

The stories that are written and read should be placed in the classroom library alongside trade books, for the other students to read (Graves & Hansen 1983).
In conclusion, I have taken the idea and examples from the articles I read and implemented the author's chair into my kindergarten classroom. I made changes that I felt were necessary to make the activity successful for my students.

CHAPTER 3

Data collection Process

" Will using an author's chair in a kindergarten class increase independent reading and writing?"

The following data will provide information on the participants, procedure, data collection tools, and data collected in the research of my capstone question.

I had a class of eighteen students, eight boys and ten girls. We followed a specific schedule when using the author's chair. On Monday we would choose four students to be the "Authors of the Week." Their names were attached to a poster in the front of the room. The students were responsible for working on their books during our free choice time, which took place Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for one hour.

On Mondays the student chose a topic and a book format. Book formats consisted of prestapled pages without words, prestapled books with words (See appendix 1 and 2), and any paper that would be stapled together when the work was completed. After the students chose what type of format to use, they would then draw the illustrations leaving one page for the title page.

After each free choice period, students would place their "works in progress" in a manila folder at the writing center so that it would be easy to find when needed. This folder was also used for students who were not "authors of the week," but decided to write something and had not finished.

On Wednesday the student would finish the illustration and add words. The words could either be written exclusively by the student, or written by the teacher as dictated by the student. The title page was also created on this day.

On Friday the student would add any finishing touches to the story. The teacher and the student would read though the story a few times to make sure that the student was prepared to read to the class. The student read from the author's chair in front of classmates and then received applause, compliments and questions from the audience. When finished in the author's chair, the student placed the book in the classroom library, picked out a special "Author" pencil, signed his name to the author's chair and posed for a picture with the other three authors that week.

Students were also given the opportunity to work on their stories during our rest time, which occurred daily for twenty-five minutes. At the end of the school year, I placed each student's book in a plastic page protector and inserted it into their Kindergarten memory books

To find out if using an Author's chair would increase independent reading and writing I used three data collection tools. The first tool I used was a tally. I tallied how many students were using the library and writing center in January. I repeated the process in May after each student had experienced using the author's chair. I would watch during free choice and record the number of students in each area.

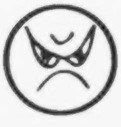
The second tool was a student survey. I asked the students to mark on the survey if they liked to read; yes or no, and if they liked to write; yes or no (see Appendix B) . The surveys were done in December and again in May.

The third tool was to ask the students what their favorite part of the author's chair was. I recorded their answers in their memory books .

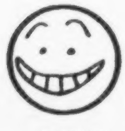
By using these three methods I felt I was getting valid data that fit into the areas of reading and writing. I feel this data was valid because I wanted to know whether or not the reading and writing center were being used more after we used the author's chair in my classroom. I visually watched how many students utilized these areas during our free choice time for two months. I also wanted to see if the students had changed their opinions of reading and writing after using the author's chair. Out of curiosity, I wanted to see what the students enjoyed about the author's chair. The last tool I used did not directly answer my question, "Will using an author's chair increase independent reading and writing in my kindergarten classroom?". But I feel that it is closely related to the answer. It also helped me determine if I would use the author's chair in my classroom again.

To assure that I was collecting accurate data I observed the writing and reading center everyday. I had the tally record on my desk where I recorded the number of students in each area. I only counted the students who were actually reading, writing or drawing in those areas. Students who were not doing those activities were not included in the daily tallies. For example, if a student went over to the writing center to ask another student to play, that child would not be included unless they sat down and began to write or draw.

When conducting the surveys, I went through an example with the entire class before I let them work individually. Only one survey was given to the class at a time. We also discussed the words yes and no. To be sure that the students understood the words, I wrote a happy face and an unhappy face on the board.



NO



YES

I feel that there are four sources of bias, which may have altered my data. The first was student surveys. Although I strongly emphasized the need for students to record their individual answers, some students may have copied the work of their neighbor or they may have written down the answer they thought that I would like to see.

The second bias is the tally system. Although I tried to tally accurately it is possible that I may have missed students due to interruptions or helping children.

The third potential bias is the developmental status of the students. It is possible that the students were simply more confident in their reading and writing abilities in May than they were in January. This could have created a more natural interest in the reading and writing centers.

The fourth bias could have been substitute teachers. If I happened to be gone a day, the teacher may not have counted and recorded the same way that I did.

Even with these biases, I believe my data clearly shows an increase in the students utilizing the reading and writing centers. I believe the results would be supportive if this research was conducted again with a different class.

Data Collection

I collected data daily for the writing and reading centers during the months of January and May. Both of these months had twenty-two school days. I collected students' opinion surveys about reading and writing in December and again in May. I asked students what their favorite part of the author's chair was at the end of May.

I collected data as a whole class and also from individuals. I used three sources for my data. Tallies showed either an increase or a decrease in the writing and reading centers usage. Surveys were used to show if students' opinions of reading and writing altered after the usage of the author's chair. The student's interest surveys determined what part of the author's chair the students liked the most and in turn were important to the success to the author's chair.

The surveys that I conducted did not have student names on them to establish anonymity. I had the students place the surveys in a basket when finished so that I would not see the child's answer.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Data

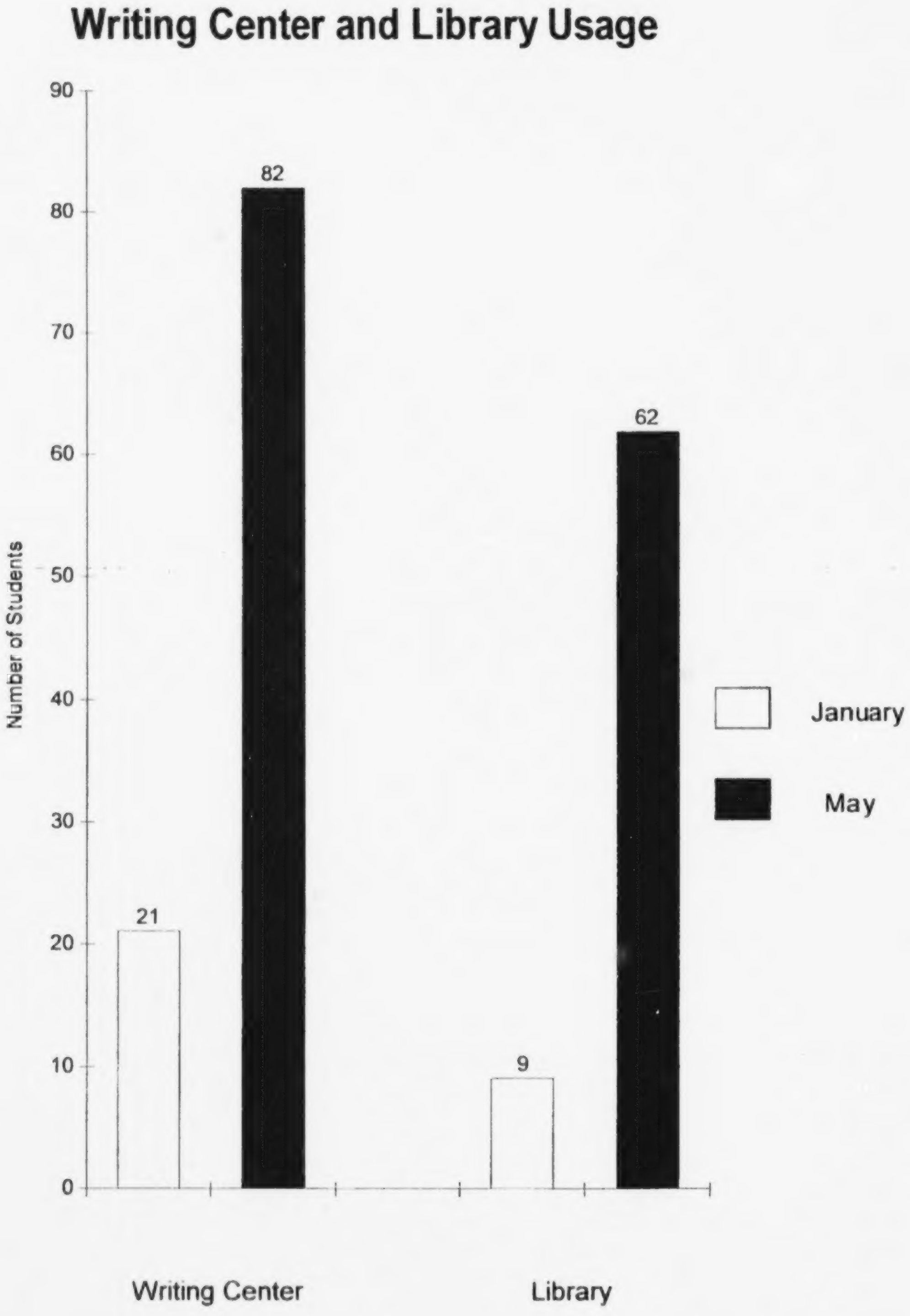
To analyze the data I used three procedures. I simply counted the number of tallies for the months of January and May and then compared the numbers. I added up the yes and no survey responses and compared the numbers. The student responses to my question regarding their favorite part of the author's chair were grouped with similar responses and tabulated.

I learned a great deal from the results of the data. The data tells me that there was a significant increase in the use of the reading and writing centers (See Graph 1). The data also shows that the students' opinions of writing were more positive than before using the author's chair. The students' opinions of reading however, did not change (See Graph 2). From asking what the students liked about the author's chair, it was easy to see that all students enjoyed some aspect of the author's chair. The most popular response from the students was that they liked reading their stories to their classmates. The results from the data show me that my data collection tools and procedures worked in my classroom. The data I collected tells me that my students were receptive to the author's chair. When their own work or the work of their classmates was on display, the students had more interest in our classroom library. I feel that this interest motivated the students to create more material, which would be read and then displayed in the library.

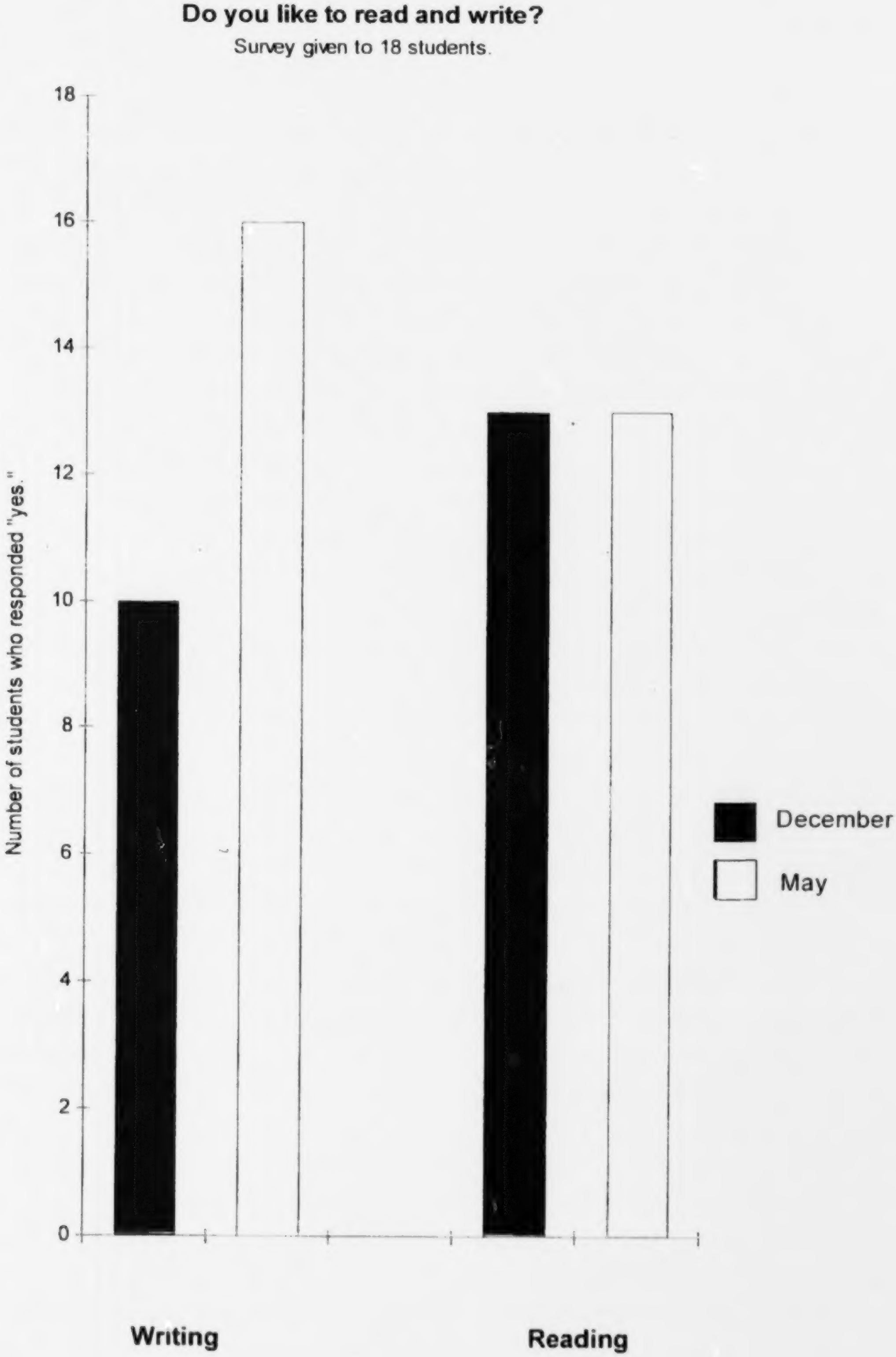
I had not anticipated asking the students what their favorite part of the author's chair was. I was extremely pleased that the majority of the students responded that reading to the class was their favorite part (See Graph 3). This leads me to believe that giving out a pencil, taking the child's picture and signing their name to the author's chair, were not critical to the success of the author's chair.

Another question I thought of as I analyzed the data that I collected was; what would have happened had I made participation in the author's chair optional? I also thought about how other grade levels could find time to use an author's chair in their classroom. Do other grade levels have classroom libraries or writing centers? Would my results have been different if I had used the author's chair in November instead of May?

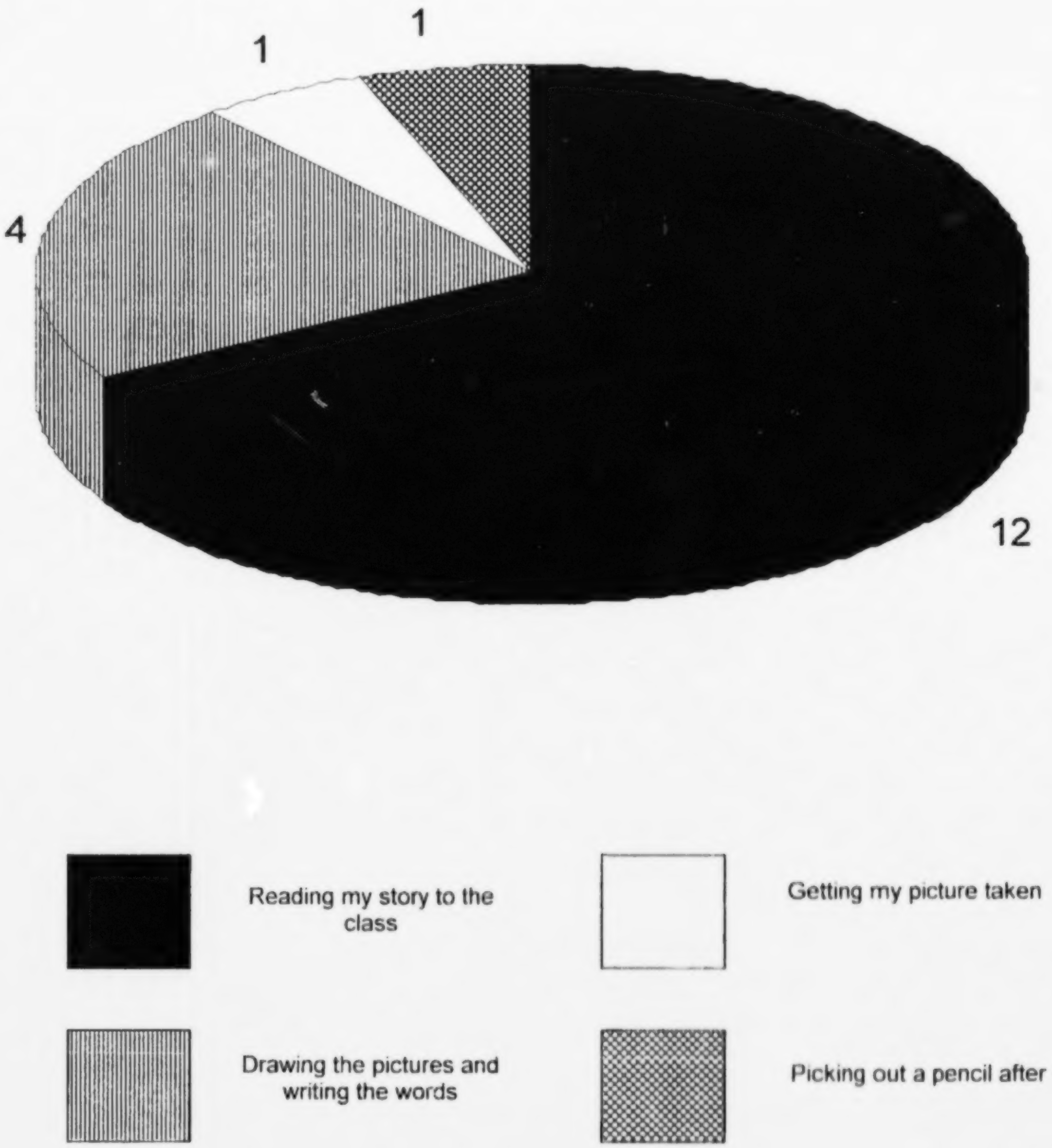
Graph 1


Writing Center and Library Usage
Number of Students
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
21
82
9
62
Writing Center
Library
January
May

Graph 2


Do you like to read and write?
Survey given to 18 students.
Number of students who responded "yes."
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
18
Writing
Reading
■ December
☐ May

Graph 3



What was your favorite part about the Author's Chair?

Question asked of 18 students at the end of the school year.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion/Action Plan

I concluded that using an author's chair in my classroom did significantly increase the time my student's spent reading and writing independently. In addition, students' feelings about writing were more positive after using the author's chair than before. However, using an author's chair did not affect student opinions of reading. I know from student responses that using the author's chair in my classroom was a positive experience.

This research showed me that allowing the students to create a book and then share it with their classmates was worthwhile and is a practice I should continue in my kindergarten classroom. I saw my students really thinking about what kind of book they wanted to create. Some told stories from personal experiences, others recreated well known stories, such as "The Gingerbread Boy" and "The Three Bears" and still other students chose to make a word book with pictures and their own words. I saw my students take pride in the choices they made and the smiles on their faces when their classmates complimented them on a job well done.

When I use an author's chair in my classroom again I will change a few details. I would like to try it where the students sign up to read instead of assigning the job. I think I would also open the chair up for students to read trade books. Very few students felt that picking out a pencil or getting their picture taken was their favorite part of the author's chair. For that reason, I would not continue those two activities.

The favorite part of the author's chair for 67% of the class was reading their book to the class. This data alone implies the importance of allowing the students to read aloud a book of their choice. I feel that this is an important piece of information for other teachers to be aware of. As teachers, we sometimes become caught up in being at the head of the class or our schedules are too busy to allow students time to read and share with the rest of the class.

I hope that other teachers will take ideas from my classroom research of the author's chair and try to make it work within their own classrooms.

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APPENDIX

A. Samples of book with words

B. Student opinion survey

I like ______________.

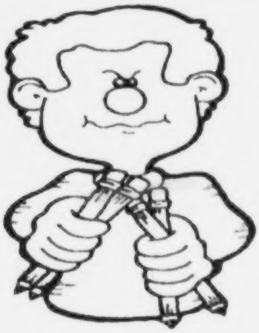
But I don't like ______________.

I see ________________________.

I see ________________________.

Do you like to write?

☐ Yes ☐ No



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